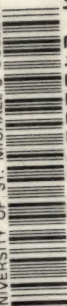


THE
CONSOLATIONS
OF
PURGATORY

UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



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FAURE

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To dear Father

P. Vermeire

from Father Bray.

IV. 4 Sunday of Lent

2^d March 1913

Pray for me!

THE CONSOLATIONS OF

PURGATORY

THE CONSOLATIONS OF PURGATORY

BY THE
REV. FATHER H. FAURE, S.M.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY
W. HUMPHREY PAGE, K.S.G.,
PRIVY CHAMBERLAIN TO H.H. PIUS X.

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Nihil Obstat.

FR. INNOCENT APAP, O.P.,

CENSOR DEPUTATUS.

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EDM. CAN. SURMONT,

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Die 3 Septembris, 1912.

PREFACE

THERE is nothing in this world more common than affliction, and nothing is more vain and frivolous than the consolations which are most frequently offered to dry the tears of those in sorrow. There is no true or solid consolation except in religion, especially when the sorrow is caused by the loss of some dearly loved friend.

How many mourners have declared that they could be reconciled to the separation if only they knew that their dead friends were happy, if someone would unveil for them the mysteries of the world beyond the grave !

Only religion with its Gospel and its revelations, the religion of Christ with its great dogmas of Purgatory and the Communion of Saints, can give them the enlightenment they desire. It tells us that if our dead friends are in heaven, they are in possession of a happiness which nothing on earth can equal, and that if they are still in purgatory, we, by our prayers

and good works, can make satisfaction for them, relieve their sufferings, and shorten the time of their detention.

This little work is intended to comfort those who are in sorrow by showing them what consolation is to be found in devotion to the holy souls ; and for that purpose it presents the doctrine of the Church according to the writings of her holy Fathers and Doctors and the revelations of the Saints.

THE AUTHOR'S PROTEST

IN obedience to the decrees of Urban the Eighth, I declare that I have no intention of attributing any other than a purely human authority to the miracles, revelations, favours, and particular cases recorded in this book, and the same as regards the titles of Saints and Blessed applied to servants of God not yet canonized, except in those cases which have been confirmed by the Holy Roman Catholic Church and the Apostolic See, of which I declare myself to be an obedient son ; and therefore I submit myself and all that I have written in this book to her judgment.

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THE CONSOLATIONS OF PURGATORY

INTRODUCTION

LIFE AND DEATH

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”—
APOC. XIV. 13.

THERE is nothing to which a man clings so closely as life—life with its succession of joys and sorrows, of hopes and disappointments, the most incomprehensible of all mysteries. It has been compared to a flower that withers when touched by the plough, or is beaten down by the rain, to smoke that is lost in the air, to a flame that blazes up and dies down in one day; it has been called a journey to eternity, a sorrowful exile, a fleeting dream.

Holy Scripture tells us that man's life is like a flower of the field, like grass which flourishes in the morning, and grows dry and withers in the evening; like a ship that passes through the waves, whereof when it is gone no trace can be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters; like a bird flying through the air, or an arrow shot at a mark; like dust that is blown away by the wind, and thin froth that is dispersed by the storm; like the remembrance of a guest of one day that passeth by (Wisd. v. 9-15).

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All these figures are chosen to remind us of the quickness of the passage of human life, but this is not the only thing we have to deplore in it, for the Scripture tells us also that life is full of misery, suffering, and tears, from the hour when a man first opens his eyes upon the world until he closes them in death.

Tears are bitter, but they are a gift of Divine providence, and without them life would be insupportable : they lighten the weight of care, and relieve the heart that is bowed down beneath its burden. Man is condemned to eat bread that is moistened with tears, but without them it would be hard indeed.

But God will give consolation in the next world to those who have borne with patience the momentary tribulations of this life, and who look forward to the eternal glory of heaven. Weep, then, poor afflicted souls ; your tears will give you comfort if you shed them in silence and resignation at the foot of the crucifix, remembering that Jesus, too, suffered and wept, that He has compassion on all that are in sorrow, that He died to win their love.

The crucifix, that image of a suffering God nailed to the cross, and lifted up naked and bleeding between heaven and earth, is the best of all teachers ; better than the most eloquent of sermons, better than the most learned of books, it unfolds to us the mystery of our destiny, and teaches us how to bear the ills of life. Suffering is a gift of God, a precious chain that binds us to Him, that brings us back to Him when we wander, that prevents us from being too closely attached to this miserable earth, and compels us, in spite of ourselves, to raise our eyes to heaven.

Suffering is the common lot of men on this earth ; we suffer in our bodies and in our souls ; we suffer in our relations and friends, in all that surround us ; we suffer in our affections ; however we may try to escape from it, suffering is with us everywhere and always.

The future looks bright when childhood is over, and we take our first steps along the path of life ; but soon sickness, and bereavements, and disappointments come upon us, and we ask the reason why, and none can tell us. When Job's three friends saw him overwhelmed with affliction they sat with him seven days and seven nights, and no man spoke a word to him, for they knew not how to comfort him.

While we are young, these spectacles of suffering do not affect us ; but by-and-by, when we have felt the bitterness of not daring to open our mouths, lest speech, instead of soothing, should only aggravate the trouble of others, we begin to feel how sad a thing is life. Happy are we, then, if we do not forget to turn to God, and seek for consolation in religion ; if we realize that God deals with us as a mother with her children. A child, ignorant of danger, leans forward to pluck a flower growing on the brink of an abyss ; he feels a hand laid upon him to draw him back, and at first resents the apparent cruelty that deprives him of his expected pleasure, but soon learns that what he thought cruelty was really his mother's watchful kindness : so does God take away from us the things we value most in order to detach us from earthly things, and draw us more closely to Himself. We care less for earth as we see those who are most dear to us removed from it, and it is in our hours of deepest sorrow that we feel the need

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of God, who has told us that "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." He promises us heaven, but we must win it by suffering, and march to glory like Jesus Christ by the hard way of Calvary.

Let us, then, not attempt to escape from the trials and tribulations of this life, for God has decreed that we shall be here only for a short time ; happy are they who pass their lives in submission to the will of God, but still happier are they who have finished their course, and gone to be with God for ever. *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.*

CHAPTER THE FIRST

HOW A CHRISTIAN SHOULD MOURN THE FRIENDS HE HAS LOST

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES tells us that if we have the misfortune to lose our relations or our friends, we should not give way to excessive sorrow, for this world is too poor a place for us to wish them to remain long in it, and it is so miserable that we ought rather to thank God than be distressed when He removes them from it. We too shall go in our turn, when it shall please God to call us ; and those who depart the first are the happiest, provided that during their lives they have thought of the salvation of their souls. It is the greatest consolation for the children of God, when their relations and friends die fortified by the Sacraments of the Church, and we ought always to take the greatest care that our sick friends are not deprived of this great blessing.

“ Yet I do not tell you not to weep,” says the Saint, “ for it is right that you should weep a little to show the sincere affection you had for the dear departed. In that you imitate Jesus Christ, who wept for his friend Lazarus. We cannot prevent our poor hearts from feeling the condition of this life, and the loss of those who were our dearly-loved companions on earth ; but there should be moderation in the outward

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expression of our grief, and the tears we shed should not be so much tears of regret as signs of love and compassion. Let us not weep like those who are wholly given up to this present life, and who forget that it is merely a prelude to eternity. Let us adore the secret designs of Divine Providence, and say often in the midst of our tears, "Blessed be Thou, O God, for all that pleases Thee is good."

Religion does not forbid us to feel the loss of those we have loved ; it does not require of us a callous stoicism which is but pride or indifference. Our Blessed Lord has consecrated affection, and blessed the kindly offices of friendship ; in the Church, too, we mourn with all our hearts, but the tears that we shed are sweet, because they are poured out upon the breast of our Divine Master, with the resignation that comes from faith and hope and love. Listen to the plaintive cry of affection which burst from the heart of St. Jerome at the grave of his dear Nepotian : " To whom shall I henceforth devote my watchings and labours ? To whose heart shall I confide my most secret thoughts ? Where is he who used to encourage me in my work by the sound of his voice, which was sweeter to me than the last song of the dying swan ? Nepotian can no longer hear me : all around me seems dead. If I try to write, I cannot see the paper for my tears, and my pen refuses to write, as if these inanimate things had a share in my grief. Every time I try to give it a free course, and to scatter a few flowers on the grave of my friend, my eyes are filled with tears, and my grief bows me down to the earth beneath which he lies."

How beautiful and touching are the words of

How a Christian should Mourn 7

St. Bernard, who mourned for one of his brothers, snatched from him by death in the very cloister in which they had lived so happily and so closely united ! “ Flow, flow, my tears, for he who would have restrained you is no longer here ! It is not he who is dead, it is I who live only to die. O Gerard, my brother, thou hast been taken from me : I have lost thee, and with thee I have lost all my joy and all my delights. Oh, who will grant me the grace to die soon and rejoin thee, for to live without thee is the most cruel suffering I can endure ? Henceforth I must live in sorrow and tears, and my only consolation will be in the thought that every day I am nearer to death. I weep for thee, Gerard, because thou wast my brother in the flesh, and still more because thou wast one with me in spirit, and we trod the same path of the service of God. My soul was bound closely to thine, our two hearts beat as one ; and now the sword of death has pierced my heart, which was all thine, and we are separated ! Oh, why did we love, since we were to lose one another thus ? and why have I lost thee after loving thee so dearly ? ” St. Augustine, too, wept over the tomb of his mother : “ Oh, God,” he cried, “ when I remembered Thy servant, and her pious love for Thee, and her tender care which never failed me, I tasted the pleasure of weeping over her and for her in Thy presence, and I gave full vent to my tears which I had hitherto restrained ; and on my bed of sorrow my heart found its rest, heard by Thee only, my Lord and my God.”

It is sweet to weep thus at the feet of our Divine Master ; tears are a gift of God, who gives them to us to soothe our grief. We are

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so unhappy on this poor earth that life without tears would be insupportable. It seems as if the Most High, while chastening man, had wished to give him in tears some comfort and consolation amid the trials of this life of sadness.

Yes, let us weep a little, when we remember those we have loved so dearly : silent grief is proud or unreal ; true affection overflows and remembers. At the thought of those whom we regret, let us shed tears with our prayers, and be comforted by looking up to heaven ; for thither our friends have gone ; thence they look down upon us, and call to us, and pray for us.

St. Francis of Sales writes to a person in mourning : " I have never been able to believe in the pretended indifference of those who do not wish us to be human ; but at the same time, when we have paid tribute to the lower part of our soul, we must do our duty to the higher part, where, as on a throne, sits the spirit of faith which should console us in our afflictions, and by those same afflictions themselves. Happy are they who rejoice at being afflicted, and thus change gall into honey ! God be praised ! It is always with tranquillity that I weep, always with submission to the will of God ; for since Our Lord loved death, and gave it to us as the object of our love, I cannot be angry with death for having taken away from me my sisters or any of my friends, provided that they die in the love of the holy death of Our Saviour. I value this mortal life so little that I never turn to God with more fervent love than when He has smitten me, or permitted me to be smitten.

" Is it not reasonable that the most holy will of God should be done in what we most cherish as in all else ? Alas ! I am but human ; my

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heart is touched more than I should ever have thought : but I will never rebel against the providence of God, who does all things well, and disposes of everything for the best. What happiness for that soul to have been taken away from the world before malice could pervert its spirit, and to have been lifted from the mire of earth before it was soiled ! Of what use is it to live long, asks the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, when we advance so little ? Long life does not always amend us ; nay, oftentimes it rather increases our guilt. Let us leave God to gather what He has planted ; He takes all in due season.

“ We must not only be willing that God should chastise us ; but we must be willing that He should do it in the way He thinks best. Let us leave the choice to Him, for it belongs to Him. Moreover, God is a good Father ; He knows why He afflicts us, and why He takes away those whom we love. Let us try to look at things as God looks at them, and let faith help us in sacrifices which are impossible to nature. Let us say to God from the bottom of our hearts, Lord, let it be as Thou wilt ; touch whatever cord Thou wilt in my heart ; it will make only a sweet harmony to Thee. O Jesus, Thy will be done without reserve, without exception, without limit, on father, mother, daughter, on all and everywhere ! I do not say we must not wish our friends a long life, and pray for their preservation ; but we must never say to God, Leave this, and take the other. And if God takes away what is dearest, shall we not still have enough, if we have God ? Is not that everything ? Alas ! the Son of God, our dear Redeemer, had hardly as much as that, when,

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having left all for love and obedience to His Father, He seemed to be forsaken and abandoned by Him."

Gaze upon Him, that loving Saviour, in the Garden of Olives, prostrate in His grief, with His face pressed upon the earth. "My soul," He says, "is sorrowful even unto death"—*Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem* (St. Matt. xxvi. 39). If His divinity had not been there to console Him, His life would have given way under the immense weight of agony that overwhelmed Him. His sweat became as drops of blood, covering His face and His whole body, trickling through His raiment down to the ground. What suffering was His! And on the cross, in all the terrible torments that He endured, look at His patience and resignation: "*Non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat!*" (Not My will, but Thine, be done!). Look! His hands and feet are pierced by great nails; His sacred head is crowned with thorns which tear the flesh of His temples; His cheeks are livid and hollow with suffering; His whole body is nothing but one immense wound, bleeding, and burning with pain; and not a complaint, not a murmur rises to His lips. *Ecce homo!* Behold the Man! Behold the model, the friend, the Saviour of men, the Divine Consoler of human suffering! But, as if bodily torture were not enough for the all-loving Heart of Jesus, the anguish penetrates His whole soul, and He seems to be forsaken by all: His Apostles and disciples have fled, and His Mother, plunged in an ocean of grief, does not hear His voice, as He begs for a drop of water to moisten His parched lips. His Father seems to have hid His face, and the Son of God, in the immensity of His agony, utters that

How a Christian should Mourn 11

heart-rending cry, which is not a complaint, but a groan of love and confidence coming from His desolate soul : “ *Deus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me ?* ” (My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ?). And when He has suffered all that it is possible for Him to suffer, when He has drained the draught of bitterness to the dregs, He looks round Him with dying eyes ; He looks to the far horizon, as if seeking to assure Himself that there is nothing more to be done, and says, “ *Consummatum est* ” (It is consummated). Then, humbly and confidently, He commends His Spirit into the hands of His Father, and, bowing His head, gives up the ghost.

In the presence of such a picture of the agony and passion of the Incarnate Son of God, who could complain, or murmur, or speak evil of suffering ? No, there is no cross too heavy, no trial too bitter, at the feet of Jesus crucified : His arms are stretched out to receive and press to His Heart all the afflicted ones of the world, and his lips are opened to pour into their souls words that are not of earth, words of heavenly comfort and consolation. Let us, then, prostrate ourselves at the foot of the cross of our Divine Master, and if the burden of our sorrow seems too heavy for us to bear, if the future seems too dark for us to penetrate, let us gaze lovingly on the wounds of Jesus, and ask Him to help us, casting our whole hearts into His sacred Heart, and He will give us consolation.

“ But what happiness for the soul of a Christian to be tried on earth by suffering and tribulation ! How can we know the meaning of fervent love, but in crosses and troubles ? Thus has our dear Saviour shown us the exceeding

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greatness of His love for us by the works of His ministry and the sufferings of His Passion, and He did not enter into His rest until He had trodden the long and toilsome road to Calvary. We Christians also, great and small, must bear our crosses after Him, as He has borne His before us."

It is well for those we mourn that they have suffered much, for we must believe that, as they have been crowned with thorns, they will wear henceforth a crown of roses. "*Cum ipso sum in tribulatione ; eripiam eum et glorificabo eum*" (I am with him in tribulation ; I will deliver him, and I will glorify him) (Ps. xc. 15). Our time on earth passes very quickly ; happy are those who leave it after a pious and holy life, full of sufferings and consolation, like the crucified Jesus ; it is to these souls that He says : " You shall be with Me in paradise." How good He is to us ! He has promised heaven to those who suffer, to those who give even a cup of cold water in His name to one of His little ones ; and we must hope that He will have given their reward to our dear departed. The word *death* has a terrible sound when we are told, " Your father is dead, your son is dead." But this is not the way that Christians should speak of it : they should say, " Your son or your father has gone before you to his country and yours ; and because it was necessary, he has passed through death." How can we look upon this world as our country when we know that we are here for a few days, or a few years at most, and when we think of the heaven in which we hope to live eternally ? We leave this earth, and we are more certain of the company of our dear friends in heaven than of those

How a Christian should Mourn 13

who are here below ; for the former are waiting for us, and we are going to join them ; the latter let us go, and put off their own departure as long as they can.

Do we not know that little by little everything here passes away from us, while heaven is the home of undying love and affection ? Oh ! let us look up to heaven, when we feel the sorrows of life and the bitterness of tears. Heaven is so near to us that we have only to lift our eyes and see it. Blessed be God who has given us hope, and has placed our eternal happiness within our sight ! Yes, let us look up to heaven, and think of our true country, where we shall find again those who have left us. That thought should be our exceedingly great consolation. A Christian is told not to be sorrowful, even as others who have no hope. We may mourn, but we must be resigned ; we may mourn, but we must see the heavens opened. Those whom we have lost are already reunited there, and it is not so far from them to us : only a short time separates us from those who have gone before, a short time of tears, of solitude, of weary waiting ; but it will soon pass, and then we shall rejoin our friends, and enjoy with them a happiness which will have no end. Oh ! how the heart is gladdened by this eternal hope ! How it hushes its sobs to listen to the voice which says, " I am in heaven ; I await you here : we shall soon meet again, and that will be for ever." Oh ! the joy of an eternal reunion ! How the thought of it consoles us for this short time of separation ! What strength and courage and peace does the Christian soul find therein ! We Christians are happy, for we cannot lose one another ; for if death separates us, hope reunites us.

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When God takes from us one by one those who are dear to us, He draws us to Himself : He detaches us from this world, this life of a day, full of misery and sorrow, and makes us long for the joys of our true home. The troubles and changes of this present world are a small price to pay for a glorious eternity. The time will soon come for us to be transformed into the glory of the children of God. How much more worthy of our love is heaven than earth, for its glorious day shall have no night, its joys no end ! If only we could realize the joy of eternity, we should say to all our friends, " Go to that happy place of rest at the hour that the Most High has fixed for you ; we too will follow you, and as time is given us only for that purpose, and the world is filled with men only that they may fit themselves to become citizens of heaven, we will do all we can to make ourselves worthy of that glorious destiny."

Yes, truly the passage of our friends to a better life is something to rejoice over, since it is the way to heaven, where they will increase the glory of their God and King. One day we shall rejoin them, but in the meantime let us carefully learn the canticle of holy love, that we may be able the better to sing it in eternity. Blessed are they who do not put their trust in this present life, but look upon it merely as a plank to be crossed in order to reach that heavenly life on which we should set all our affections.

We are told that the companions of Alexander, when sailing over the Indian Ocean, discovered Arabia Felix by the perfumes of its aromatic woods blown to them by the light winds that

How a Christian should Mourn 15

filled their sails ; and that they thereupon determined to take possession of the country. Thus we who look forward to the possession of our eternal home, while still travelling over the stormy sea of this world, experience a foretaste of heaven, which animates and encourages us in a wonderful manner. But we must keep our helm steady, and fix our eyes and aspirations on the desired haven, where those who have left us are awaiting our arrival. A few days, a few months, of separation will soon pass ; and yet when we are on the point of starting, we mourn for those who are gone before.

“ Let us have patience, and wait bravely till the hour strikes for us to go where our friends have already arrived ; and as we have dearly loved them, so let us go on loving them, and because of our love, let us do what they would always have wished, and still wish, us to do.

“ It is certain that the dearest wish of those loved ones, when they left us, was that we should not indulge in excessive grief over their absence, but moderate our sorrow for love of them ; and now from the midst of that happiness which they enjoy, or at least confidently hope for, they wish us to enjoy a holy consolation, and to keep our eyes and our thoughts for better subjects than those of sadness. ‘ Weep not,’ they tell us, ‘ but rather follow the path that leads you to the place where we are : you will reach it by bearing your cross ; loving God, and serving Him with all your hearts, in mourning, in bereavement, in sorrow and tears, with which your life is filled. Heaven is the goal, and to reach it you must pass through trials, as the soldier marches to glory across the field of battle without fear or hesitation.’ And since

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true friendship seeks to comply with the reasonable desires of a friend, let us try to please those dear souls by resigning ourselves to the will of God, and fearlessly commending ourselves to the infinite mercy of our adorable Saviour " (*Letters of St. Francis of Sales*).

Let us remember, too, that these dear, departed friends belonged much more to God than to us ; and if in His providence He has decided that it is time to call them to Him, we must believe that He has done it for the greater good of their souls, and we must lovingly acquiesce in His hidden designs, adoring in silence, and blessing Him who directs and governs all things by His wisdom.

The lot of children who die after baptism and before attaining the age of reason is more a subject of gratitude than tears, for faith teaches us that they go at once to take their place among the choirs of angels. As to those who die without the sacrament of regeneration, theologians, following St. Thomas, tell us that, although they do not attain to the beatific vision or the happiness of heaven, they are not unhappy in the next world. In the place which is called Limbo they enjoy a natural rest and happiness in the midst of those enjoyments procured for them by the perfections and gifts which they have received from the infinite goodness of God (St. Thomas, Suppl. q. 69).

Moreover, God, in His mercy, and to reward the piety and faith and prayers of their parents, may supernaturally enlighten the souls of those children at the moment when they leave the body, and may enable them to know and desire baptism ; and thus, purified by the effect of this desire, they take their flight at once to heaven.

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Many sorrowful mothers, it may be, whose grief has touched the heart of the Almighty, will find one day among the cherubim those children from whom they thought they were separated for ever.

The world is not so pleasant that we should mourn greatly over those who have escaped from it. God in His mercy has delivered them from the miseries of this life, from the sufferings and dreariness of old age, the anxiety of worldly affairs, the troubles and commotions of the times, the disappointments of fortune, the infirmities and diseases and calamities of every kind which threaten us every moment of our lives. For what is human life but a tissue of grief and sorrow? And how many days have we passed without some trouble and anxiety or other? Happy are those whom God has delivered from this world, in which everything is full of deceit and falsehood and hypocrisy, and in which we are always exposed to calumny and injustice. O God, how can anyone cling to life when he sees how quickly it passes, and how full it is of misery and tears?

No, let us not mourn too much for those who have gone before us: if they have died young, they have escaped from so many more troubles, and as the account they will have to give to God will be so much lighter and less formidable, they will be the sooner admitted to the joys of heaven: if they have died in mature age, they have at least been spared the last drops of that cup whose dregs are so bitter; they have gone when they had nothing to look forward to but the weakness and suffering of old age, and what is there to regret in this?

And why should we lament? Our dead are

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not so far from us as we think : without seeing them, we can still commune with them, and tell them all we feel : if they are in heaven, faith tells us that they still care for us, and in God see what we are doing, and hear the words we address to them, and that they pray for us ; if they are in purgatory, it is easy to entrust to our guardian angel the messages we wish to send them. Why should we not imitate that pious daughter who, having lost her mother, never ceased to converse with her through her good angel ? She told her all her difficulties, and asked her advice ; and whatever light and consolation she received, she attributed it to that loving mother.

Sister Marie Denise de Martignat, of the Order of the Visitation, who died in the odour of sanctity, used to confide to the guardian angels of the souls in purgatory the prayers she offered for them and the messages she wished to send them, and her biographer tells us that often these pious communications went so far that the charitable nun felt she was surrounded by those good protecting angels, who made known to her the necessities of the suffering souls committed to their charge, and showed her what she was to do for their deliverance.

Be comforted, then, ye afflicted souls, and instead of passing your time in fruitless mourning, pray for your departed friends, multiply your prayers and good works and Communions. You will give them more pleasure by these than by your tears, and if they are still in purgatory, you will help them. Pray, and go on praying ; that is the way to show true Christian love. There is so much power in prayer ; it is an act of faith, hope, and charity. The Gospel tells us

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that when Jesus was sorrowful even unto death in the Garden of Olives, there appeared to Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him. For us, the angel who supports us in sorrow, who consoles and strengthens us, is the angel of prayer.

Prayer is a need of the soul, especially beside the grave of a friend. When bereavement comes, life seems a burden to us ; our soul seems to be carried towards those calm, pure, lofty regions where we must look for those whom death has taken from us : we feel the desire to see them, to speak to them once more ; but what will raise our souls from the earth and transport us beyond the stars to that other and brighter world in which dwell the spirits of the departed ? Prayer, humble and confident prayer, the prayer of a child on the bosom of his father. Oh, if those who are in affliction did but know the hidden treasures, the heavenly consolations of prayer, how quickly their tears would be dried, and how willingly they would accept the cross which God sends them !

Without prayer, sorrow condemns us to solitude and bitterness, and we have no one to whom we can open our hearts ; for men are naturally selfish, they do not love tears, and turn away from those who mourn : and if sometimes they deign to receive our confidences, and listen to our sighs of anguish in spite of their repugnance, we soon feel their coldness and the poverty of the consolations they offer us. Men's hearts are very narrow, and none can take the place of those we have lost, nothing can fill the void their absence has left, nothing can make up for the intimate friendships cut short by death. O death, how many dear ones

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hast thou taken from me ! I look for them everywhere with tearful eyes, I call upon them in vain : but let me quit this earth, let me cast myself upon Thy bosom, O my God, for there I shall be no longer separated from them by the cold grave. As I draw nearer to Thee, the friends I have loved come before me, and I embrace them all by prayer.

Prayer is to the human soul like wings of light, which raise it and transport it to heaven ; and when it comes back from those tranquil regions, on fire with that seraphic ardour which it has drawn from the bosom of God, it faces with new strength and courage the struggles of life, for it knows that above it are the protecting arms of the Almighty. Nothing escapes the notice of the all-seeing eye of God : His fatherly care looks down upon the blade of grass or the atom of dust as upon the star and the cedar-tree ; He hears the humming of the little insect which is drowned in a drop of dew or takes shelter from the storm under a leaf as plainly as He hears the cry of the eagle soaring among the clouds. He pours His blessings on all His creatures, but He looks down with the greatest kindness on the children of men. For them He made the world ; His eye follows them with inexpressible tenderness ; He loves them like a father, like the best and most affectionate of fathers ; He only waits for their prayer in order to grant it ; and He has promised to give all we ask of Him with faith and submission and love. How consoling is this promise, and how precious to those who mourn for the loss of friends !

Pray, then, ye desolate ones—pray for your departed friends, and you will have resignation and an inward assurance that God will grant

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your request. How sweet it is to pray for those we have lost, to know that we can help them, even when they have passed beyond the grave ! How consoling is the thought that we can do something for the happiness of those we have loved so dearly !

CHAPTER THE SECOND

WE MUST PRAY FOR ALL THE DEPARTED, AND
NOT DESPAIR FOR THE SALVATION OF ANY

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES would not have us despair of the conversion of a single sinner till he breathed his last sigh. He went still further, and did not like to hear anyone pass an unfavourable judgment even on those who had died after living a bad life. His principal argument was that, as the first grace of justification is not merited by any precedent good work, the last grace, which is that of final perseverance, is not given us for any merit of our own. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" (Rom. xi. 34). Therefore he bade us hope for the dead person, even though we might have seen him die an unhappy death, because we can but conjecture from outward appearances, by which even the wisest persons may be deceived.

His biographer, Mgr. Le Camus, Bishop of Beliez, tells us that one day someone was repeating in his presence those solemn words of the Gospel, "Many are called, but few chosen" (St. Matt. xx. 16), and remarking that the elect were spoken of as a "little flock" (St. Luke xii. 32), and the number of the reprobate as infinite, and so on. The Saint replied: "I believe there will be very few Christians damned"

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(he was speaking of those belonging to the Catholic Church), "because the root of the true faith which they had must sooner or later produce its fruit, which is salvation; from being dead it becomes alive, and works by charity." When he was asked what was the meaning of the Gospel parable of the small number of the elect, he replied: "If we compare the number of Catholic Christians with the rest of the world, including heathen nations, their number is certainly very small, but of this number I believe very few will be lost;" and in support of this opinion he appealed to the goodness of God, being confident that He, having begun a good work in a man—that is, by giving him the faith—would perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus. Was it possible, he asked, that the vocation to Christianity, which was a work of God and a perfect work, leading to the supreme end which is the glory of heaven, should very often fail to produce its effect?

I added then, says the Bishop, the following reason, which he admitted to be a good one: the mercy of God being above all His works, and surpassing even His justice, it does not appear likely that He would have begun to build up the salvation of the true Christian by faith, which is the foundation, without putting on the crowning stone, which is charity.

Although the Church has not pronounced upon this disputed question, the belief in the greater number of the elect seems nevertheless conformable to the true meaning of Holy Scripture. In the twentieth chapter of St. Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is likened to a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. He went out again

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about the third hour, and again at the sixth, and the ninth, and even at the eleventh hour, and hired men, and sent them to work ; and when evening was come, he ordered his steward to pay them their hire, giving to those who had worked but one hour the same as to those who had been engaged from the early morning. These last began to complain, and the Master reminded them that he had paid them the wage for which they had agreed to work, and added : " So shall the last be first, and the first last for many are called, but few chosen."

Now, if we wish to understand the meaning of the last words, we must not separate them from the context, but explain them by the rest of the parable. And what, asks a learned theologian, do we see in this parable ? Are the majority of the labourers deprived of their wages at the end of the day, and are we to conclude that the majority of men who work for God on earth will lose their reward in heaven ? No ; all the labourers in the parable receive the same reward, and the only conclusion we can draw from the sacred text is the inequality of the wages and reward after the toils and hardships of life. But, far from being the expression of God's anger, these words are the manifestation of His mercy towards sinners, and the marvellous efficacy of true repentance.

In the twenty-second chapter of the same Gospel the kingdom of heaven is likened to a king who made a marriage for his son, but those who were invited—*i.e.*, the Jews—would not come. Then he sent his servants to go into the highways and call to the marriage all they could find ; and his servants gathered together all they could find, both bad and good. These

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are the Gentiles and barbarians called to the faith of Jesus Christ ; and among all this crowd only one man was rejected, because he had not on a wedding garment. Then the king said to the waiters : " Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen." One only is excluded : here again, then, the number of the reprobate is the smaller number.

Thus, concludes the learned Bergier (*Dict. Theolog. Elect.*), if the parables of the Gospel are to be admitted as proofs, we must believe that the greater number, and not the smaller number, will be saved. Jesus Christ compares the separation of the just from the wicked at the Last Judgment to the separation of the cockle from the wheat at the time of harvest (St. Matt. xiii. 24) ; but in a field that is cultivated with ordinary care, the cockle is never more abundant than the wheat. Again, He compares it to the separation of the fish caught in the net, of which the good were chosen into vessels, and the bad thrown away (ver. 47) ; but what fisherman is so unfortunate as to catch more bad fish than good ? Of the ten virgins who went to meet the bridegroom and the bride (xxi. 1), five were allowed to go in with the bridegroom to the marriage ; in the parable of the talents (xxv. 14), two servants were rewarded, and only one was punished ; and, as we have seen, only one guest was sent away from the marriage feast.

This is also the opinion of the profound and learned Suarez, the great commentator of St. Thomas : " Under the name of Christians we may include all those who have the honour to

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bear the name of Jesus Christ, and profess to believe in Him, although among them many are heretics, apostates, and schismatics, and in this sense we may say it is probable that the greater number will be rejected ; and it is thus I understand the more severe opinion. For as there have been always many heretics and apostates, if we add to their number those Catholics who die a bad death, it is evident that they will be far more numerous than those who die well. But if by Christians we understand those only who die in the Catholic Church, it seems to me more probable under the law of grace that the greater number will be saved. The reason is, first, that the greater number of those who die in infancy have been baptized ; and as to the adults, although the majority of men commit mortal sin, yet they repent of their sins, and pass their lives alternately sinning and repenting. Moreover, there are few who are not prepared for death by the Sacraments, and who do not at least make an act of attrition in detestation of their sins, and that is enough to justify them at once ; and the rest of their life is so short that it is easy for them to persevere without falling again into mortal sin. Thus, all things being considered, it is probable that the majority of Christians—that is to say (taking the word in its more restricted meaning), the majority of those who die in the Catholic Church—will be saved. *Pensatis omnibus, verisimile est plures ex his Christianis salvari*” (Suarez, book vi., chap. iii.).

This distinction removes all difficulty in the interpretation of the sacred text. Many are called, because it is of faith that God will have all men to be saved (1 Tim. ii. 4) ; few are

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chosen, if we consider the whole human race and the great number of those who do not belong to the Catholic Church. "*Vidi turbam magnam quam dinumerare nemo poterat,*" says St. John in his visions of the Apocalypse (vii. 9). "I saw a great multitude which no man could number of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and in sight of the Lamb, with white robes, and palms in their hands."

The belief in the greater number of the elect is more in harmony with the infinite goodness and mercy of God, and more likely to encourage and comfort us ; but we must not make it an excuse for committing sin, which would necessarily draw down upon us the anger and the curse of God.

Thus, then, even when those we mourn have not led very regular or Christian lives, even when they have died suddenly without time to receive the last Sacraments of Holy Church, let us not despair ; let us remember that the mercy of God is infinite—*quoniam in sæculum misericordia ejus*. Who can tell that some good thought, some perfect act of contrition, did not find a place between the last word and the last sigh ? Who knows all the secrets of that God who "will have all men to be saved" (1 Tim. ii. 4) ; who "desireth not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezech. xxxiii. 11) ? God Himself says by the mouth of the prophet Isaias : "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb ? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven Thee in my hands" (Isa. xlv. 11, 12).

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Who can tell what effect may be produced in the soul of a dying man by the sight of the eternity that is about to begin, and by the approach of the just Judge, into whose hands it is a terrible thing to fall? There are in some deaths hidden mysteries of mercy, and God grants His grace where the eye of man sees only His justice. At the last moment God reveals Himself to souls whose greatest misfortune has been not to know Him; and the last sigh, understood by Him who fathoms the secret depths of our hearts, may be a pleading cry for pardon. Let us not forget that one hour, one second, is enough for God to enlighten a darkened intelligence, and touch a heart that is hardened in sin: when no human voice can reach the ear of the dying man, the voice of God can penetrate his soul, and bring him to repentance. Who shall dare to set bounds to the infinite mercy of God?

Learned theologians think that at the moment of death God offers special and extraordinary grace to sinners in order to excite them to repent before they appear at the bar of His justice; and we know that an act of perfect contrition is enough to wipe out all the sins of our past life, and insure eternal salvation. Thus, under the influence of those extraordinary graces and the light that is vouchsafed to a soul at the approach of death, the act of contrition becomes easy, and one moment is enough, one word—"My God, forgive me"—or even less than that, one simple aspiration of the heart towards Him we have offended.

According to Father Faber, the extreme severity of purgatory would be inconceivable if we did not believe in a vast number of souls

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saved, and saved, too, with very imperfect dispositions. Purgatory explains the enigmas of the universe, as much as any of the things established by God. In presence of this system of expiation, which we might almost call an eighth sacrament—the *sacrament of fire*—for souls on which the seven real sacraments have not sufficed to confer perfect purity, must we not admit that it is an invention of God in order to multiply the fruits of the Passion of Our Saviour, established for the benefit of that great multitude of souls, who were to die in His love, though their love for Him was imperfect? Purgatory, indeed, gives us a sort of proof, both of the mercy of God and of our own cowardice: that is why souls are sent there by thousands, to receive from the flames the beauty they do not possess.

This manner of regarding purgatory is well adapted to convince us of the immensity of God's goodness and His unchangeable mercy: considered from this point of view, it seems to lose its mournful aspect, and to appear as the supplement of the sacraments of penance and extreme unction. How many poor souls are carried off every day by sudden illness or unforeseen accidents, and cross the threshold of eternity without any preparation whatever! They must have been lost, but oh, the power of the mercy of God! a grace as efficacious as it is unexpected is poured out upon them; they correspond with it, and are at once reconciled to the Supreme Judge by an act of sincere and perfect contrition. It is a miracle, but a miracle that is easy to Him who waits only for a sigh of the human heart to forgive, and to change a thief into one of the elect. *In æternum misericordia ejus.*

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Father de Ravignan loved to speak of the miracles of grace which he believed to be effected at the hour of death, and he was of opinion that a great number of sinners are converted in their last moments, and die reconciled to God. " He is lost, that poor man who boasted of his impiety ; he is lost for ever, in the company of those wicked men who jeered at his faith, corrupted his morals, kept from him at his last hour the priest and the sacraments, and obtained his written direction to bury his body in an unblessed grave. The Church mourns over those scandalous funeral ceremonies in which she has no part ; like a mother, she trembles for the fate of that poor soul whom she has not been permitted to visit, to enlighten, and to reconcile with its God ; she is desolate like Rachel, but she will not refuse to listen to me when I say to her, ' Be consoled, for perhaps this son whom you mourn is not lost for ever : it may be that he detested his sin, and yet concealed his repentance, that when the emissaries of Satan thought to deliver his soul to the prince of darkness, he escaped by an act of sincere contrition, which he made in his heart, but was unable to utter with his dying lips. It may be that God, seeing in his inmost soul the germ of repentance, mercifully hastened his end, and, preserving his soul in the way of salvation, cast him with that blessed germ into purgatory, where He will complete His work of sanctification by those sufferings which He will make him love. Hope, holy Church ; purgatory saves for thee, I doubt not, many souls that belong to thee by desire, though they are in heresy and schism ; souls that have belonged to thee only at their last sigh ; souls that have

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escaped from the snare of the fowler of hell, and have sung in purgatory their song of thanksgiving for their eternal deliverance.'"

General Excelmans was killed suddenly by a fall from his horse, and, unfortunately, he had not practised his religion : he had promised to go to confession, but had never had time to do so. Father de Ravignan, who constantly prayed, and had prayers said for him, was greatly distressed when he heard of his death ; but the very same day, a person who was accustomed to receive communications from heaven thought he heard a voice saying to him : " Who knows the extent of My mercy ? Who can tell the depth of the sea ? Much will be forgiven to certain souls which have not known much."

Father de Ponlevoy, from whose writings this story is taken, says : " As Christians living under the law of hope, as well as that of faith and love, we must rise from our sufferings to think of the infinite mercy of Our Saviour. There is no barrier between grace and the soul so long as a breath of life remains ; we must therefore always hope, and persevere in humble and fervent prayer. No one can tell when our prayers may be answered ; great Saints and Doctors of the Church have insisted on the powerful efficacy of prayers for the departed, whatever may have been their end. We shall understand one day the ineffable wonders of the mercy of God, and we must never cease to pray for it" (*Life of Father Ravignan*, chap. x.).

St. Gertrude had long prayed for the soul of a person whose friends were in great anxiety about his salvation, and had asked for her prayers ; and one day Our Lord appeared to her and said : " For love of you, Gertrude, I

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will have pity on this soul and a million others : by that Divine light which penetrates the future, I knew that you would pray for this poor man's soul, and for the sake of those future prayers I placed him, when he was in his agony, in the proper disposition to procure him a good death, and prepare him to enjoy the fruits of your charity : his soul is saved, and if you desire it, I will release it from its sufferings " (*Life of St. Gertrude*, chap. xix.).

A lady, whose husband had died suddenly, without time for preparation, threw herself at the feet of the Curé d'Ars, in a state of distress, for the unedifying life of her husband had caused her to be in great fear for him. " Be of good cheer," said the holy priest after a moment's thought ; " God had mercy on your husband, and gave him time to repent, for the sake of the prayers you offered for his conversion, and those God knew you would offer after his death : he is saved, but he has still a long purgatory to undergo, and you must continue to pray for him."

It is related in the *Lives of the First Sisters of the Visitation*, by Mother de Chaugy, that Sister Marie Denise de Martignat, when praying one day after Communion for the souls of the departed, was led by Our Lord to the gate of purgatory, and there saw in the midst of flames the soul of a prince who had been killed in a duel a short time before ; but it was so far down, so deep in purgatory, and had been so long in its prison, that the charitable nun was greatly distressed. " Mother," she said to her Superior, after having described what she had seen, " who will deliver that soul from purgatory ? I fear it will remain there till the Day of Judgment.

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But God is merciful, even in His justice : that poor prince lived for the pleasures of the world ; he had no thought for his soul, and no devotion to the sacraments. I am not so much struck by the sight of his sufferings as overjoyed at the manifestation of the mercy and charity of God. The man died in the commission of an act which deserved hell, and he only escaped it, not for any merit of his own, but because of the share which he had, in virtue of the Communion of Saints, in the prayers that were offered for him. Almighty God has been moved by those prayers, and, in spite of the man's wickedness, has had compassion upon him ; we must henceforth teach everyone to pray and get others to pray to God and the Blessed Virgin and the Saints for that last moment of grace at the hour of death, and to prepare for death by a good and holy life ; it is Our Lord's will that a good life should produce a good death, and though He sometimes works miracles, no one has a right to expect such a privilege for himself. Many souls are lost in the circumstances in which that prince was saved ; he had but one moment in full possession of his senses, one moment to co-operate with that precious grace which enabled him to make an act of perfect contrition : not having lost the faith, he was like tinder waiting to be kindled ; and the Divine spark of grace having touched the centre of his soul, it burst into flame, and produced that act of love which saved him from hell. God made use of that natural instinct which is in us all to cry for help when we are in danger of death in order to touch the heart of that prince, and impel him to ask for mercy. The grace of God is more active than we think : in the twinkling of an eye He

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works His wonders in the soul that is willing to co-operate with Him : one instant is enough for the soul to receive grace and submit to its almighty and life-giving influence."

Our Lord said one day to St. Bridget : " I am so merciful that, if it were possible, I would willingly suffer again the agony of the cross for every sinner." And on another occasion, when she was praying for a great sinner who was sick, He said : " The man who is now sick, and for whom you are praying, has spent his life in wickedness ; but tell him that if he is resolved to amend his life in case he recovers, I will pardon him, and bring him to My glory." A few days afterwards the Saint saw the soul of the sinner leave the earth on its way to purgatory, saved from hell by the mercy of God (Rev. ii. 12).

Once more St. Gertrude, in her revelations, tells us of a promise made by Our Lord, full of precious consolation in respect of those whose careless lives have given us reason to doubt of their dispositions at the hour of death, and the sincerity of their repentance. " While I was reflecting on the fact that many Christians at the hour of death seem to repent more from fear of eternal punishment than from love of God—for I had heard that no one can be saved without so much love of God as will produce repentance and abandonment of sin—Our Lord said to me : ' When I see in their agony persons who for My sake have done some good action deserving of reward, I will show Myself to them at the hour of death with a countenance so full of love and compassion that they will repent from the bottom of their hearts for having offended Me during their lives, and will be saved

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by that repentance. I desire that My chosen ones should recognize this mercy, and give thanks for it among the many gifts that men have received from Me' " (*Life of St. Gertrude*, book iii. chap. xxx).

Hope, then, dear sorrowing souls ; hope in that God whose mercy " exalteth itself above judgment " (St. Jas. ii. 13). Trust in Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is so full of love and pity that He cannot bear to let anyone perish, but will go forth, like the Good Shepherd, to search for the lost sheep till His feet are torn and bleeding from the thorns and stones of the road, and when He has found it will lay it on His sacred shoulders, rejoicing. Have you ever heard of love so tender, so compassionate as His ? The Gospel tells us He went through Judæa doing good ; comforting the afflicted, healing the sick, raising the dead, and repulsed none who came to Him. The prophet Isaias says of Him : "*Calamum quassatum non conteret, et linum fumigans non extinguet*"—The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench (Isa. xlii. 3). He forgave the penitent Magdalene, and would not condemn the woman taken in adultery ; and when His friend Lazarus died, He wept, for He loved him. He wept, too, over the guilty city, when from the summit of the neighbouring hill He contemplated it in its magnificence and its ingratitude, and those sad words showed the sorrow of His fatherly heart : " Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldest not " St . Matt. xxiii. 37). *Et noluisti*. And as He

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cannot bear to live far away from those whom He had loved so much, and who put Him to death, He perpetuates the miracle of the Eucharist, and remains the prisoner of the tabernacle, always a victim and a friend, blessing us, and drawing us to Him, the clean oblation continually offered to appease the justice of His Father.

Go, then, to Him, ye who weep ; go and throw yourselves at the feet of that Jesus who calls you and says : “ *Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos* ”—Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you (St. Matt. xi. 28). Yes, come to this good Master, this loving and charitable Friend ; pour out on His bosom your tears of anguish : He has words to console you, and He will fill your souls with hope that will lift you up, and love that will give you strength to endure all things.

He awaits your prayers ; He encourages and invites them. Perhaps in His merciful charity He has made the salvation of some departed friends depend upon the prayers that you will offer Him after their death : pray, then, pray with confidence, however discouraging may have been the lives of those you mourn. God is so good, so compassionate and merciful, that He will never refuse anything He is able to give ; His heart cannot but be touched by your prayer. Pray, and perhaps soon the souls that you love, preserved by your prayers from everlasting fire, will come forth from the place of expiation full of gratitude, and wing their flight to heaven, there to enjoy the presence of God for ever.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE EXISTENCE OF PURGATORY, ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

“**T**HERE shall not enter into it”—that is, into heaven—“anything defiled,” says St. John in the Apocalypse (xxi. 27). Whoever enters heaven, then, must be pure, free from all stain of sin, in order to enjoy the vision of God, and to take part in the celestial choirs, the blessed company of those who rejoice in the eternal happiness of the new Jerusalem; And yet there is something between perfect holiness and enmity with God: among those who are struck down by death there are some who have never committed mortal sins, or have atoned for them by a good confession and sincere repentance; there are some who have had only venial sins on their conscience. Would it be just if these were treated like the avowed enemies of God, and cast with them into eternal fire?

No; God, who is justice itself and essential goodness, could not act in this manner, and by the mouth of His Holy Church He declares that those who die in a state of grace, but without having entirely satisfied the Divine justice in this life, will, before entering into heaven, complete their expiation in a place which is called purgatory, by the temporary punishment due

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to mortal sins, of which the guilt has been remitted, or to venial sins of which they have been guilty.

In one of His admirable discourses to the people of Judæa, Our Lord Jesus Christ revealed, under the allegorical form of a parable, the mysterious dogma of future expiation. "When thou goest with thy adversary to the prince, whilst thou art in the way, endeavour to be delivered from him : lest perhaps he draw thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the exacter, and the exacter cast thee into prison. I say to thee, thou shalt not go out thence, until thou pay the very last mite"—*Dico tibi ; non exies inde, donec etiam novissimum minutum reddas* (St. Luke xii. 59). Our Divine Lord is speaking of man while he is still on earth, and going with his adversary in the way—*Quum vadis cum adversario in viâ*. We are in the way, in theological language, as long as we are in this world, and it is only here that we can go in the way with our adversary. The moment the soul crosses the threshold of eternity its movement stops ; it ceases to go forward, because it ceases to merit : and it is precisely for this reason that Our Lord exhorts us, while we are still in the way, to free ourselves from all kinds of debt to our adversary (that is, to God, whose anger and enmity we have provoked by our offences), because beyond the grave we shall no longer have the power to do so. *In viâ da operam liberari ab illo*.

When a man dies, the scene changes ; he ceases to go with his adversary in the way, and falls into the hands of an inexorable judge, who delivers him, if he deserves it, to those whose duty it is to execute sentence upon him,

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and they throw him into prison, which he shall not leave till he has paid all he owes. And there is no question here, as St. Ambrose says, of any considerable debt incurred by grave faults, and rendering the debtor liable to eternal punishment, but of a small and almost insignificant sum—*novissimum minutum*. To show what importance He attaches to this teaching, Our Lord uses in this parable the words by which He prefaces His most solemn sayings, those He wishes to be taken most literally: "*Dico tibi*"—I say to you. Yes, I say to you that the prison of which I have spoken to you is not a fiction, but a reality: if you are My debtors, understand clearly that when you come to My judgment, you will be committed to prison by the executors of My justice, and will not be released until you have paid the last farthing.

This solemn comparison of debtors and creditors leads us, step by step, to a complete demonstration of the doctrine of purgatory. The debtor is the just man who died without having completely satisfied the debt of temporal punishment to which he was liable; the pitiless creditor is God, who after this life silences the voice of His mercy, and allows only His justice to speak, and who will exact the payment of the smallest debts, and reparation for the smallest faults committed against Him. Lastly, the prison in which the debtor is to be detained, but with a certain hope of being released when his debts are paid, is evidently a place of temporary trial, from which the soul, freed from its debts and from all trace of sin, will take its flight to heaven, where its place is already prepared.

The Apostle St. Paul, in his First Epistle to

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the Corinthians, gives us an equally convincing proof of the reality of purgatory. He tells us that other foundation no man can lay but that which is laid, Christ Jesus ; and goes on to say : " If any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be manifest, for the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire ; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is " (1 Cor. iii. 12, 13). Those whose work is spared by the fire, because it is perfect, being of gold, or silver, or precious stones, shall receive without delay the reward they have deserved : "*Si cujus opus manserit quod superædificavit, mercedem accipiet*"—If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward (ver. 14). But those who have built with wood, or hay, or stubble, which easily catch fire—that is to say, those who have done imperfect work—shall undergo the punishment due to them ; nevertheless, they shall be " saved, yet so as by fire "—*Si cujus opus arserit, detrimentum patietur ; ipse autem salvus erit, sic tamen quasi per ignem* (ver. 15). This passage clearly shows us that while only a small number of just men go to heaven immediately after death to receive the reward of their perfect work before God, most men have to expiate their little faults and imperfections before entering into possession of eternal happiness.

This text, according to the Doctors of the Church, implies the possibility of a just man dying and going down to the grave with some remains of weakness and imperfection still attaching to his soul ; the certainty that in the next life he will find somewhere a place of purifi-

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cation in which he can be freed from the dust of earth ; and the precious assurance that, after having passed through this fire, whatever be its nature, he will go to take his place, like a diamond without flaw or defect, in the walls of the city of God. Every fault, whatever it may be, is a disorder which can only disappear when order has been established by punishment, and justice demands that the guilty shall repay the last farthing—" *Donec reddas novissimum quadrantem* " (St. Matt. v. 26). It is true that Our Blessed Redeemer, by His passion and death, has made satisfaction for all the sins of mankind ; but as we are reasonable beings, God has desired the free co-operation of our good works, in order that the merits of Jesus Christ may be applied to us, and by the aid of His grace those good works may become truly meritorious. Although the stain of sin is always effaced in those who are justified, and the eternal punishment is always remitted, yet, on account of the imperfection of their work, there remains to them a temporal punishment to be undergone, without hope of remission. Moreover, even when grave sins are forgiven, there are still to be found stains produced by those lesser faults which we commit thoughtlessly ; and if they do not deserve a sentence of eternal punishment, they constitute a real obstacle to our immediate admission into that blessed home where all must be holy and undefiled.

There must, then, be for souls affected by these stains, when they leave this life, a place of temporary expiation between heaven, which they are not yet worthy to enter, and hell, to which eternal justice does not condemn them. That place is purgatory, which is, as it were, a

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purifying crucible, in which the soul leaves behind it the impure alloy by which it is sullied, and is prepared to take its flight to the heavenly Jerusalem, where God waits to bestow its reward.

Such is, and always has been, the belief of the Catholic Church. It is of faith that the penalty of sin is not always *entirely* remitted with the guilt, that what remains must be expiated either in this world or the next ; that there is a purgatory for the souls of the just who are not entirely purified at the time of their departure from this life, and that these souls can be helped by the prayers and suffrages of the faithful. The Council of Trent formally declares : " If any man affirms that the penitent sinner who has received the grace of justification receives at the same time the pardon of his sin and the remission of the eternal punishment that he has deserved, in such manner that no debt remains of temporal punishment to be undergone in this world or the next in purgatory before entering into the kingdom of heaven, let him be anathema " (Sess. 6, chap. xxx.).

The same Council, in its twenty-fifth Session, adds : " The Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, having always taught in conformity with Holy Scripture and the ancient tradition of the Fathers in the Sacred Councils, and most recently in this General Council, that there is a purgatory, and that the souls which are there detained are helped by the prayers of the faithful, and especially by the sacrifice of the altar, always acceptable to God, the Sacred Council directs the Bishops to take care that the wholesome doctrine of purgatory be taught and preached everywhere, in order that the faithful

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may hold and profess it, as it has been handed down to us by the holy Fathers and the Sacred Councils."

The Councils of Florence, the Lateran (Fourth), and Lyons passed similar decrees, as the Council of Carthage had already done in A.D. 397. "We define," said the Fathers assembled at Florence, "that if any of the faithful have died truly penitent in the charity of God, before having made satisfaction for their sins of act or omission by worthy fruits of penance, their souls are purified after death by expiatory pains" (Sess. 10).

This teaching of the Councils is in harmony with that of the Doctors and Fathers of the Church, who ground their opinions on Holy Scripture. But even if the Church had neither the authority of the Gospel nor that of the holy Father for this article of faith, the practice of praying for the dead would be sufficient to establish it. Prayer for the dead is intimately connected with the belief in purgatory; we pray for them only because we hope to help them, and we hope to help them only because they are in a state of probation and suffering. The Church does not pray for the Saints in heaven, nor for the reprobate; but prayer for the dead is as old as the world.

St. Augustine, commenting on these words in the Gospel of St. Matthew—"He that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world, nor in the world to come" (St. Matt. xii. 32)—expresses himself in these words: "It would not have been said of some with truth that their sin shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come, unless some sins were remitted

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in the next world " (*De Civ. Dei*, book xxi.). And in another passage: "These prayers for the souls of the departed must not be omitted; the Church by a general commemoration offers such suffrages for all who have died in Christian and Catholic Communion, in order that they may be benefited who have no parents, nor children, nor relations, nor friends" (*De Cura pro Mortuis*, c. i.).

St. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, in one of his letters, asks for the prayers of his friends for the repose of the soul of his brother, in order to procure for him refreshment and consolation in the pains of the other life. St. Ambrose, commenting on Ps. cxviii., draws a distinction between the fire which after this life consumes those sins to which there has been no deliberate consent of the will, and the fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels—that is, between the fire of purgatory and that of hell. St. Ephrem similarly lays down that, until the day of the Last Judgment, there is between heaven and earth a middle place, in which souls may be purified from those sins which they have not sufficiently expiated in this life.

St. John Chrysostom says in his *Homilies* (21 and 51): "It is not in vain that oblations and prayers are offered, and alms given, for the dead. So has the Divine Spirit ordained things, that we might mutually assist one another." And St. Jerome, in a letter of consolation to Pammachius on the death of his wife Paulina, says: "Other husbands strew various flowers on the graves of their departed wives; but you bedew the venerable remains of Paulina with the sweet essences of charity; knowing that as

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water quenches fire, so do alms extinguish sin " (Ecclus. iii. 33).

St. Cyprian, who lived in the third century, teaches that there are three states of men after death: that of the Saints in heaven; that of hell, in which the wicked suffer eternal punishment; and that of purgatory, in which souls are purified by fire before being admitted into the realms of glory (*Letters* 56). Tertullian, who was born in A.D. 160, and wrote at the end of the second century, and was therefore barely separated by a century from the Apostles, says that Christians in his time made offerings for the dead. " If you ask me for the law in favour of these practices, I tell you you will find no written law; but tradition gives them the sanction of its authority, custom confirms them, and faith commands us to observe them " (*L. de Coron.*, c. iii.).

The Old Testament clearly proves the belief of the Jews in the doctrine of purgatory, and the usefulness of prayers for the dead; for we find that Judas Machabeus, after a battle, ordered public prayers and sacrifice to be offered at Jerusalem for the sins of those that had been slain, " thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection, and because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness had great grace laid up for them " (2 Mach. xii. 43).

But it is not only the Catholic Church, it is not only the Jews who in their sacred books affirm the existence of purgatory; we meet with expressions of this belief in various forms amongst all the peoples of the world, and in the earliest ages. The learned and sublime Plato, in the midst of the paganism of ancient Athens, thus expresses himself: " Those who have lived

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in a manner which is neither wholly criminal, nor absolutely innocent, suffer pains proportionate to their faults, till, being purified from their defilement, they are set at liberty, and receive the reward of their good actions."

The Romans had a similar belief, as Virgil shows in Book vi. of the *Æneid*, where Anchises explains how the vital spark in men gets clogged, and has to be purified below before they pass into Elysium, where some few remain.

"Ergo exercentur pœnis veterumque malorum
Supplicia expendunt. Aliæ panduntur inanes
Suspensæ ad ventos, aliis sub gurgite vasto
Infectum eluitur scelus aut exuritur igni :
Donec longa dies, perfecto temporis orbe,
Concretam exemit labem purumque relinquit
Cœtherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem.
Quisque suos patimur manes ; exinde per amplum
Mittimur Elysium et pauci læta arva tenemus."

vv. 739-747.

We may search among the records of all nations in history, from the savage nomads who piously carried about with them the bones of their fathers, to the civilized Greeks and Romans, who were so scrupulous in their observance of the rites instituted to appease their tutelary deities ; and, though the rites varied, we find everywhere funeral expiations, offerings, and prayers for the dead. How is it that we find such perfect agreement in all the nations of the earth, differing most widely in religion, manners, language, and laws, if not because their belief takes its rise from the very source of truth ? To what can we more justly apply the ancient maxim that the voice of the people is the voice of nature, and the voice of God ?

Such are the grounds on which the Catholic

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doctrine of purgatory rests : tradition and the unanimous consent of all nations are certainly arguments of the greatest weight ; but above all these we have the solemn words of Jesus Christ, the testimony of the Apostles, the faith and teaching of the infallible Church, which give us on this point the most perfect certitude. The existence of purgatory is an article of faith.

What hope and consolation it gives us ! What treasures of mercy has God poured out upon us in providing for us even after this life the means of atoning for our faults, our weaknesses and imperfections, of cleansing ourselves from the stain of our sins, in order that we may present ourselves one day before His adorable face, and enjoy the happiness of His presence for all eternity.

But how sweet also is the belief that keeps alive in us the remembrance of our departed friends and their sufferings : for we must believe that our relations and friends in their prison are helped by our prayers and good works, and that we too shall be helped when our turn comes. " O holy Catholic religion," exclaims a learned Prelate, " true religion of the heart, how I love to see thee lifting with a mother's hand the dark veil of our mourning, and strewing flowers even on the pathway to the tomb !"

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

PURGATORY ACCORDING TO THE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

THE souls in purgatory, says St. Bonaventure, when they have not made sufficient reparation on earth for their past offences, are punished by a material fire which torments them more or less, according as they have more or less to expiate. Yet they enjoy the hope of happiness and the assurance of salvation, and when the fire has removed the stains of their sins, they go at once to heaven, and enter into the glory of paradise.

The reason for purgatory, adds the same holy Doctor, is that every fault committed offends the Divine Majesty, soils and deforms the image of God imprinted on the soul, especially if the sin be mortal ; but even venial sin disposes to that which is mortal. Every offence deserves punishment, every wrong demands reparation, every stain requires to be washed away : and as the punishment must be just and proportioned to the fault ; as the soul, despising the eternal and sovereign good, has voluntarily submitted to *an inferior good*—that is, to a creature—it is just that that soul should be made subject in its turn, and in spite of itself, to another creature, in order to be chastised by the very objects which have caused it to commit sin, and

on account of which it has set God at nought, and degraded itself. That is the reason why the justice of God requires that the spirit shall be punished by material fire, so that, as the soul is united to the body to give it life, so in the order of justice the soul is united to fire as to the instrument of its chastisement " (St. Bonav., part vii., Breviloquii, c. ii.).

St. Augustine expresses a similar opinion (*De Civ. Dei*, c. x, 3): " Although the souls of men are separated from their bodies, they are, nevertheless, attached to the fire in a miraculous and *ineffable* manner, not to give life to the flames, but to receive from them the impression and the punishment they deserve." For since all are not equally liable to the Divine justice, whether because they have not all been equally guilty in this life, or because they have not equally neglected the means of paying their debts, it would not be reasonable that all should suffer the same punishment; and yet they all endure the same fire, which in itself is not capable of discriminating between them. Consequently, as the omnipotence of the Judge who makes use of the fire to punish the guilty gives it an activity which surpasses its natural force, it must give it also a sort of intelligence to treat each soul according to its deserts. The Sovereign Judge is at the same time supremely wise, and it is an effect of His wisdom to make the punishment proportionate to the sin; and, although the pain of purgatory is temporary for all, it is longer and more severe for some than for others, according as they have committed more sins and done less penance for them. The pain, adds St. Augustine, must correspond to the wrong done by love; for the

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more the soul is attached to the earth by the love of worldly things, the more difficult is it to purify it and remove the stain. "*Necesse est enim ut tantum urat dolor quantum læserat amor.*"

Moreover, as inordinate affection is voluntary, the satisfaction, to be meritorious, must also proceed from a free will. But the pain of purgatory does not depend on the will of the soul, which endures it in order to satisfy the justice of God ; and, although the soul may accept it willingly, it is no longer capable of acquiring merit. The rigour of the punishment, then, must make up for this defect, and the Judge who imposes the punishment must determine for each soul the degree of severity and the time of its duration. We read in the *Revelations of St. Frances of Pampeluna* that, of many hundreds of souls she saw in purgatory, the greater number were condemned to remain there for thirty, forty, or even sixty, years. One man, for too great love of the vanities of the world, passed fifty-nine years in purgatory ; another sixty-four years, because during life he had been excessively addicted to gambling.

St. Cyprian expresses the opinion that there will be some souls which will remain in purgatory till the end of the world, for sins deserve severe punishment as much on account of the majesty offended as the ease with which they have been committed, and the neglect to do penance for them. The punishment must last longer than the sin, lest men should imagine that sin is not a very great evil.

It would seem, from various revelations, that persons consecrated to the service of God, such as priests, monks, and nuns, by reason of the

holiness of their vocation and the numerous lights and graces bestowed upon them, are punished in purgatory more severely than simple lay persons. Sister Frances of Pampe-luna mentions a priest who was detained forty years for having negligently allowed a person to die without the Sacraments ; another forty-five years for having been careless about the duties of his office ; a Bishop five years for having ambitiously sought preferment ; another forty years ; and another forty-five years for simple faults of administration. According to Cardinal Bellarmine, it was revealed to St. Lutgarde that Pope Innocent III. was condemned to remain in purgatory till the end of the world, in spite of his great zeal for the Church. We hear, in other revelations, of priests detained for long periods for having neglected the intentions of Masses ; and monks and nuns expiating in the flames for months and years their offences against charity, obedience, and mortification, or their voluntary distractions during prayer and the Divine Office.

St. Bridget mentions the case of a soldier who had been condemned to remain in purgatory till the end of the world, but was released, after four years of suffering, by the alms and fervent prayers which his wife offered for that purpose (Rev. i. 6).

The sister of St. Vincent Ferrer appeared to him after her death, surrounded by flames, and suffering intense pain. "I am condemned," she said, "to endure this punishment until the Day of Judgment, but I shall be greatly helped, and perhaps even delivered, if you will celebrate for me the thirty Masses

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of St. Gregory." The Saint hastened to comply with her request, and on the thirtieth day his sister appeared to him, ascending to heaven surrounded by angels (*Life of St. Vincent Ferrer*, chap. xiii.).

St. Frances of Rome saw souls condemned to seven years of purgatory for a single mortal sin not fully expiated ; and we read in the *Life of St. Magdalen of Pazzi* that one of her sisters was detained sixteen days for three very slight faults, or more than five days for each fault. How many years, then, must those souls remain, if we do not pray for them, which, indeed, avoid mortal sin, but every day commit a great number of venial sins, and neglect to atone by works of satisfaction and the use of indulgences ! And what of those souls which often and lightly commit mortal sin ? How careful we ought to be to avoid even little sins ; how fervently we ought to adopt the practice of Christian mortification in the performance of the duties of our state, and endeavour every day to gain the indulgences offered us by the Church !

Two holy nuns, Sister Bernardine and Sister Catherine Paluzzi, were united by one of those supernatural friendships which take root in Christian souls, and help their growth in holiness in such a marvellous manner. These two pious women encouraged each other in the service of their Divine Spouse, and as such a friendship as theirs could not be broken by death, they promised to continue to love and help each other after this life, adding a compact that, with the permission of God, the one who died first should appear to the other to tell her of her fate, and instruct her in the mysteries of the life beyond the grave.

Bernardine was first called away. She died after a painful illness, borne with Christian resignation, promising to come and tell Catherine what became of her after her judgment. Weeks passed, months passed, and there was no sign that the deceased nun remembered her promise. Catherine in the meantime redoubled her prayers, imploring Our Lord to have mercy on her friend, and allow her to reappear.

So a year passed away, and on the anniversary of Bernardine's death, Catherine, while at prayer, had a vision of a well, from which issued volumes of flame and smoke. Presently she saw someone come forth from this well, surrounded by dark clouds, which gradually cleared away, and her friend emerged, radiant with light. "Oh, why," asked Catherine, "did you delay so long? And what is the meaning of this pit, and this fire and smoke?" "For a year," replied Bernardine, "I have been detained in purgatory, and it is only now that I am permitted to enter into the heavenly Jerusalem" (*Life of the Venerable Catherine Paluzzi*).

The punishment of fire and the sufferings which result from it constitute what theologians call the pain of *sense*; but there is in purgatory another equally severe, which is the pain of *loss*, consisting in exclusion from the sight of God. The soul, when committing deliberate sin, even though it be only venial sin, has deliberately turned away from God, insulting and defying His sovereign perfection, His infinite holiness; and it is only just that it should be punished after death for the offence which it has not had time to expiate during life, by temporary deprivation of the

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sight of God, in whom it sees all its happiness, and towards whom it is attracted by all its love. now detached from earthly things, by all its desires, and all the aspirations of its nature and faculties. "*In purgatorio erit duplex pœna : una damni, in quantum scilicet retardantur a divinâ visione ; alia sensus, secundum quod ab igne corporali puniuntur*" (St. Thomas, Suppl., q. 100, a. 3).

The pain of *loss*, as well as the pain of *sense*, admits of differences in duration, and in the degree of its intensity ; for the exile of purgatory is a temporary exile, perfectly just, and proportioned to the faults of each soul. It must, then, be longer or shorter, more or less intense, according to the debt which the soul still owes to the justice of God.

The Doctors of the Church agree in saying that the pains of purgatory surpass in intensity all the pains of this world. "The fire of purgatory," says St. Augustine, "is not eternal ; nevertheless, it is very severe, more terrible than any pain ever endured on earth, even than the appalling tortures inflicted on the martyrs" (*De verâ et falsâ pœnitentiâ*). And, again : "All pain that we can see, or feel, or imagine in this life is trifling in comparison with the sufferings of purgatory" (Serm. 42; *De Sanctis*). St. Gregory, St. Cyril, St. Anselm, and St. Bonaventure express themselves on this subject in similar terms.

We read in the *Life of the Venerable Mother Agnes of Jesus* that while she was praying by the grave of one of her nuns, who had died a few days before, the deceased Sister suddenly appeared before her, clothed in her habit, and the reverend Mother felt as if her face were

scorched by fire. The nun addressed her in tones of deep grief: "Oh, my Mother, if men only knew how intense are the pains of purgatory, they would be always on the watch to avoid them."

"The fire of purgatory," says the holy Doctor, "is an *intelligent* fire; *sapiens pœna . . . ignis ille sapiens*" (St. Cæsarius of Arles, Sermon 252; St. Paulinus of Nola, Ep. 28). It affects the intelligence, the memory, the sensibility, the whole soul. All the faculties of the soul are invaded and penetrated by the avenging fire; for the fire of purgatory has this peculiarity: that it is not, like the material fire of the earth, a gift of the wisdom and goodness of God, but the instrument of His avenging justice, destined to correct and purify whatever in man has been soiled by sin. The souls in purgatory suffer in their thoughts *painful and distressing visions and imaginations*; in their memories, *poignant remorse and regret for the past*; in all their senses, *different tortures*, corresponding to the nature of the sins committed and the degree of culpability contracted in each sin.

The Church, as a learned theologian observes, has not defined anything to be believed as of faith in respect of the duration or nature of the pains, or of the place of purgatory (F. Perrone, Tract. *De Deo Creatore*, p. iii., c. vi.). Nevertheless, St. Thomas and many others declare that there is a special place set apart for the punishment of the souls in purgatory, and that this place is not heaven, nor hell, but some intermediate place not far from hell.

Although the soul after death is no longer united to the body, of which it is the sub-

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stantial form and motive principle, says St. Thomas, yet particular places are set apart for souls according to the degree of their merit or dignity, in which they exist locally, not according to the manner of bodies, but after the manner suitable to spiritual substances; and as the place of their habitation, whether for reward or punishment, is assigned to them as soon as they are separated from the body, they are immediately cast into hell or transported to heaven, unless they are for a time detained by some debt which requires the postponement of their entrance into glory until they are sufficiently purified.

Sometimes the souls of the departed are permitted by the wisdom of God to appear to men on earth, as St. Augustine relates of the holy martyr Felix, who appeared to the inhabitants of Nola when they were besieged by the barbarians. We know, too, that God permits the souls in purgatory to show themselves to the living in order to ask for their prayers. St. Gregory records a number of such instances (*Dial.* iv., c. xxxvi.). But there is this difference between the elect and the souls in purgatory: that the former are allowed to appear when they wish, *Sancti, cum voluerint, apparere possunt viventibus*, while the latter cannot do so without the permission of God (St. Thomas, *Suppl.*, q. 169, a. 1, 2, 3).

Nevertheless, although these souls are for a time allowed to leave the place assigned to them, their state of joy or suffering is not changed. The abode of the soul, says St. Thomas, constitutes its reward or punishment, inasmuch as it is in a state of joy or pain, according to the place to which it is destined, and the joy or

pain resulting from this destination continues in the soul, even when it is outside the place assigned (Suppl., q. 69, a. 3). As the glory of the elect is not diminished when they leave the regions of bliss, so the pains of the souls in purgatory do not cease when God permits them to return to the earth. St. Thomas tells us, also, that the reprobate can appear on earth, when God permits it, to warn men, and instil into them a wholesome fear of His judgments ; but wherever they are, the devils and the souls of the damned carry with them the torments which they suffer in the flames of hell.

Although Holy Scripture tells us nothing clearly as to the *place* of purgatory, yet, according to the writings of the Fathers and numerous revelations, it is probable that there are two sorts of places set apart for the purification of souls. "According to the common belief, the ordinary abode assigned to the souls in purgatory is an inferior place, contiguous to hell, so that the same fire purifies the just and torments the reprobate, although the latter are placed in a lower place still, below that of purgatory. *Locus purgatorii est locus inferior, inferno conjunctus ; ita quod idem sit ignis qui damnatos cruciat in inferno, et qui justos in purgatorio purgat* (St. Thomas, Appendix, a. 2). The other place is a spot assigned by God as a mark of His favour and indulgence to certain souls for their purification. It is thus that souls punished in different places are sometimes seen on earth, whether for the instruction of the living or the consolation of the dead, in order that their sufferings, being known, may be mitigated by the prayers of the Church."

It is recorded in the *Life of St. Magdalen of*

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Pazzi that, while she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, she saw arise from the earth the soul of one of her sisters, who was still detained in purgatory. The sister was enveloped in a mantle of fire, which covered a robe of dazzling brightness, and she remained for a whole hour prostrate at the foot of the altar, humbly adoring her God hidden under the Eucharistic species. When Magdalen asked the meaning of this apparition, God informed her that this soul had been condemned to come every day to pass an hour in adoration, wrapped in a mantle of fire, and that the white robe was the garment which she had won by her virginity, and which gave her the greatest consolation. As that hour of adoration was the last hour of her penance, Magdalen saw her entirely transfigured, taking her flight to heaven.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

PURGATORY ACCORDING TO THE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH (*continued*)

THERE exists in purgatory, as we have seen, a double pain—the pain of *loss* and the pain of *sense*. But are there two states, one in which the soul suffers both these pains, and the other in which it suffers only the pain of loss? Cardinal Bellarmine thinks there are. He says: “There is in purgatory an honourable prison in which the faithful are detained without any other suffering but the postponement of their beatitude, because during life they had not a sufficiently ardent desire for the vision of God and His only Son Jesus Christ.”

St. Bridget, in her *Revelations*, tells us very clearly that there are three states in purgatory—the first, in which souls suffer intensely; the second, in which they feel only a certain weariness; and the third, in which they suffer no pain, but have a great longing to see God. “Above the darkness of hell,” she says, “but still in darkness, souls undergo the pains of purgatory. The deep gloom, and the knowledge of the nearness of the hell beneath them, is the great cause of suffering in this first state; souls detained therein suffer more or less, according to the measure of their fault. Near this place there is another, in which the suffer-

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ing is less, and consists only in a want of strength and beauty, as in the case of a sick person, who, though cured of his illness, is without strength, and recovers it only by slow degrees. Besides the deprivation of the sight of God, which is common to all in purgatory, there is no other suffering but a feeling of languor. Lastly, in a neighbouring but more elevated region, is the upper purgatory, in which the punishment of *sense* is unknown, and the soul feels only an intense desire to approach God and enjoy the beatific vision. In this place certain souls are detained for a very long time, for there are few persons who have sincerely and ardently desired heaven during their lives " (*Revelations*, book iv., chap. vii.).

However that may be, we may be certain of this : that the pain of loss, which exists in each one of these states, is incomparably greater than that of sense ; and that if the souls in purgatory had the choice, they would rather suffer any punishment, however severe, than be excluded, even for an hour, from the presence of God. " You may threaten me with a thousand hells," says St. John Chrysostom—that is to say, with all the pains of sense that can be endured in hell—"but all that is nothing in comparison with the loss of glory" (*Hom. 27 on St. Matt.*).

The beauty of justice is so great, says St. Augustine, and the happiness of eternal light—that is to say, of God's unchangeable truth and wisdom—is so overwhelming, that only to enjoy that happiness for a single day is better than a long life filled with all kinds of temporal blessings (*De libero Arb.*, tit. iii.).

A pious lady of Luxembourg, a short time

after her death, appeared to a virtuous young girl, asking for the help of her prayers. Every time this young girl went to church and approached the holy table the soul of the deceased accompanied her in human form, and at the elevation of the Host her face was radiant as the face of a seraph ; but outside the church she was never seen. When the girl asked her the reason, she replied, with a sigh : “ Ah ! you do not know what pain it is to be far from God. Nothing can express that pain. I ardently desire to see God, and it is such anguish to be deprived of His presence in punishment for my faults that the intensity of the fire which surrounds me is trifling in comparison. To mitigate the severity of my punishment, the Lord has permitted me to come into this church and worship Him in His earthly temple until the longed-for day arrives when I shall possess Him in heaven. Even under these eucharistic veils His presence so fills me that I live only for Him ; what will it be when I see Him face to face in paradise ? ” And she begged the child to hasten that happy moment by her prayers (Eus. Nieremberg, *De Pulchr. Dei*, book ii., c. xi.).

The essence of the pains of purgatory is the love which souls have for God—love which is continually increased by their more perfect knowledge of His perfections, and is manifested by the intensity of their desire to behold and possess Him. It is a hunger, a thirst, a fever ; a hunger for God, a thirst for God, a fever for God. This desire borrows something from the sovereign greatness of its object. The intensity of the longing is indescribable ; their whole being is merged and concentrated in it.

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The whole condition, the whole life, the sole occupation, of these souls is hungering for the sight of God ; they do nothing else, for they are incapable of anything else. And this bread for which they hunger, this water they thirst for, this indispensable good they desire, this Being who is their life, their peace, their happiness, and towards whom they continually press forward as if to embrace Him—He is absent, He is far off ; and this absence of God, which was the rule in this life, is their greatest trial after death. It is no longer God that keeps the creature at a distance ; on the contrary, it is the hour when He would expect it to come to Him. He calls it, He draws it to Him, He stretches out His arms to embrace it ; and the soul knows this, though it sees Him not ; it feels Him near, and longs to rush to Him, but fate holds it back. Can any trial be harder to bear ?

In one sense, the soul loves the chains which detain it ; but for all its wisdom and holiness, its love is only the more fervent, and it is this unsatisfied desire which is its punishment. Perhaps the mysterious fire which consumes the soul comes principally from that source. " God will not send that fire down upon you from afar off," says Bossuet, addressing sinners ; " it will be in your own conscience, and will be produced by your own sins, which does not prevent the fire from enveloping them after consuming them internally " (Mgr. Gay, *De la vie, et des vertus Chrétiennes*).

It may be asked how material fire can affect souls separated from their bodies ; to which St. Thomas answers (Suppl., q. 70, a. 3), while we believe that the fire of hell is a real and

material fire, and not merely figurative, it is certain that the soul will suffer pain from this material fire, because God has told us it is prepared for the devil and his angels, which are incorporeal, like the human soul itself. First, it may be said that the suffering felt by the soul consists in seeing itself in the flames ; and though a material fire cannot burn the soul, yet the soul perceives it as hurtful, and this perception fills it with terror and pain. This is what St. Gregory means when he says that the soul burns because it sees itself burn.

But this is not sufficient, and we are compelled to admit that the soul really suffers from material fire. " We may conclude from the words of the Gospel," says St. Gregory (*Dial.* iv., c. xxix.), " that the soul suffers from the fire, not only by perceiving it, but by feeling it. And this may be in two ways, for we may consider this fire in itself, in so far as it is material or natural, and then it is true that it cannot act upon the soul ; and we may consider it also as the instrument of the avenging justice of God, the order of Divine justice requiring that the soul, which has yielded itself to serve corporeal objects by sin, shall be made subject to them by pain ; and as an instrument acts not only in virtue of its own nature, but also at the will of the principal agent, there is nothing repugnant to reason in supposing that this material fire, acting by the power of a spiritual agent, really affects the spirit of a man or the devil in a manner analogous to that of the Sacraments which, as we know, produce upon men's souls real effects of sanctification."

St. Augustine also says that, as the soul in man's present condition is united to the body,

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inasmuch as it gives life to the body (although the soul is spiritual and the body is material), and as in consequence of this union it conceives a great love for the body, so, when separated from the body, the soul is, as it were, chained to the fire, inasmuch as it receives its punishment from the fire, and has a great horror of it because of this union ; so that the material fire by its own nature possesses what is necessary for the incorporeal spirit to be united to it, as a localized object is united to the place in which it exists ; and as the instrument of Divine justice it has the power of holding the soul enchained in such a manner as to cause it to suffer (*De Civ. Dei*, book xx., c. x.).

St. Thomas teaches also that the souls in purgatory are not tormented by the wicked angels, although the latter may accompany them to the place of their punishment, and be present at their purification, in order to gloat over their sufferings. It is possible, also, he adds, that their guardian angels conduct them to purgatory (Suppl., q. 2, a. 3). St. Frances of Rome says the same. "When a soul goes down into purgatory, its good angel accompanies it to that prison, and then takes his place outside near the door, where he remains until the soul is entirely purified. He visits it frequently, to console it by his presence and heavenly discourse, and inspire it with courage to disregard the jeers of the demons and their hideous appearance. It is his duty to collect the prayers and good works offered by the living, and to present them to God, who gives them back to him to apply them to the poor souls like a healing balm" (*Life of St. Frances of Rome*, vol. ii., p. 228).

A holy man whom God permitted to see the flames of purgatory recognized in the midst of them one of his friends, who showed extraordinary joy ; and on being asked the reason, replied : " My guardian angel has just told me of the birth of a child who will one day become a priest, and obtain my release from this place of punishment by the first Mass he celebrates " (Lacerda, *De Excel. Cæl. Spir.*, c. xlviii.).

The guardian angels render most valuable service to the souls in purgatory by suggesting to the faithful on earth the thought of praying for them, and having Masses said for their intention ; for these charitable and devoted spirits never cease to be interested in the souls that God has committed to their charge.

Some Fathers represent to us these heavenly spirits as hovering round the altar at Mass to receive in golden chalices the precious Blood of Jesus Christ in order to sprinkle it like cooling dew over the flames in purgatory ; and every moment, we are told, souls, purified by this expiatory outpouring, take their flight to heaven.

As St. Margaret of Cortona was praying to Our Lord with tears for all the friends she had lost, they appeared to her surrounded by flames, and in such a lamentable condition that she could not endure the sight. Our Divine Redeemer said to her : " The pains they endure are very great, but would be incomparably greater if they were not visited and consoled by My angels, the sight of whom comforts them in their sufferings and refreshes them in the heat " (Bolland., February 22).

These revelations are perfectly consistent with the teachings of theology. According to

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most Doctors, the guardian angels conduct the souls into purgatory, and place them in communication with the living, encouraging us to pray for them, and informing them what persons are fulfilling this charitable office. The life of the Venerable Agnes of Jesus, who lived in constant familiar intercourse with the holy angels, is full of apparitions, in which we see these faithful friends of men making intercession for their clients, and bringing to them in the midst of the flames the refreshment for which they sigh, leading them to heaven when the time of their expiation is finished, and coming to announce to the living that their prayers have been heard.

We find the same facts in the lives of a great number of Saints, so that we cannot doubt that the holy angels are the natural intermediaries between purgatory and earth, as they are between heaven and purgatory. What a consolation is this to those who during their lives have shown devotion to their guardian angels ! How often will they be visited in their prison by these charitable and pure spirits ! With what confidence will they be able to turn to their angels and say, like holy Job : "*Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei*"—Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends (Job. xvi. 2).

Some theologians have been of opinion that the Saints cannot intercede for the souls in purgatory, but a great number of revelations prove the contrary ; these writers have confounded impetration with satisfaction. It is certain that the Saints, not being able any longer to merit for themselves, can no longer make satisfaction for others, and, consequently,

in this respect their position in regard to the souls in purgatory is less advantageous than our own ; but they can pray, for it is of faith that they pray for us, and why should their intercession stop at the door of purgatory ? The Saints, then, pray for the suffering souls, for those who were their friends on earth, and numerous instances show that these prayers of the Saints have great power with God ; which is only natural, for the Saints are the privileged friends of God, and their prayers are accompanied by all the qualities which are too often wanting in our own.

The holy patrons whose names we have borne, and who have protected us during life, continue their assistance to their clients who groan in the flames of purgatory. Father Faber says : " Numberless patron Saints are personally interested in multitudes of souls. The affectionate relation between their clients and themselves not only subsists, but a deeper tenderness has entered into it because of the fearful suffering, and a livelier interest because of the accomplished victory. They see in the holy souls their own handiwork, the fruit of their example, the answer to their prayers, the success of their patronage, the beautiful and finished crown of their affectionate intercession. All this applies with peculiar force to the founders of Orders and Congregations. Those Saints, those founders, are the children of the Sacred Heart ; who, then, can tell how founders yearn over their children in the sacred fires ?" (*All for Jesus*, chap. ix.).

It is also a pious belief, founded on various revelations, that the Blessed Virgin sometimes visits the souls in purgatory, principally on

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Saturdays and the eves of her Feasts, either to console them, or to shorten the time of their expiation, or to deliver them entirely. She intercedes with God for them, and obtains for them the remission of a part or the whole of their debt, especially for those who have been most devout to her while on earth.

How good she is to them ! says St. Vincent Ferrer ; how she soothes their grief ! A poor sick person, who endures the most acute suffering, is less comforted by words of consolation than are the souls in purgatory by the very name of Mary. This name of hope and salvation which they love to invoke brings down upon them the pitying gaze of their loving mother ; and as she offers to God her prayers for their relief, there descends upon those poor souls a dew of heavenly consolation.

" I am the Queen of heaven," she said one day to St. Bridget ; " I am the Mother of mercy, the sinner's ladder to heaven. There is no pain in purgatory that cannot be made lighter or more endurable by my help " ; and on another occasion : " I am the Mother of all those souls in purgatory, and all the pains which sinners suffer for the expiation of their faults are assuaged by my prayers."

We read in the Office of the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel that, according to a pious belief, the Blessed Virgin consoles with a mother's tenderness the members of the Confraternity of Mount Carmel in purgatory, and that her prayers procure for them a speedy passage to their heavenly home.

The Venerable Sister Paula of St. Teresa of the Order of St. Dominic had a great devotion to the souls in purgatory, and was rewarded for

it by miraculous visions. Every Saturday she prayed most fervently to the Blessed Virgin for these poor souls, and one Saturday, while thus praying, she was rapt in an ecstasy, and carried to the middle of purgatory. What was her astonishment to find it transformed, as it were, into a paradise of delights, and instead of the flames and darkness which usually fill it, shining with a marvellous brightness! As she wondered what could be the reason of this happy change, she perceived Mary surrounded by a multitude of angels, whom she commanded to release the souls which had been devout to her, and lead them to heaven.

The learned and pious Gerson says that every year, on the Feast of the Assumption, the Blessed Virgin re-enters heaven, followed by a numerous procession of happy souls, whom she has just released from the flames of purgatory. Denis of Chartreux assures us that the same thing takes place on the Feasts of the Nativity and the Resurrection of Our Blessed Lord (*Sermon on the Feast of the Assumption*).

According to learned theologians and pious writers, this privilege is extended to the day of the Commemoration of All Souls, and also to the principal Feasts of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother. These happy days, they tell us, as well as Saturdays, are welcomed in purgatory as days of rest and consolation and deliverance. This is also the opinion of St. Alphonsus Liguori, who says: "*Facile crediderim in quocumque Virginis solemnii festo plures animas ab illis pœnis eximi*"—I could easily believe that on all the Feasts of the Blessed Virgin many souls are delivered from those pains.

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Mary, moreover, suggests to the faithful the charitable thought of offering to God prayers, alms, and penances, and, above all, the adorable sacrifice of the Mass for the departed, and sometimes obtains for those souls which are destitute of spiritual aid the grace of being allowed to go and ask for help on earth, as we read in the Lives of St. Lutgarde and many other Saints.

But it is specially on behalf of those who have been devout to her that Mary manifests her motherly kindness. St. Bernardine represents her as occupied in visiting purgatory and seeking out her devout servants in the midst of the flames in order to relieve their sufferings. *Subveniens necessitatibus et tormentis devotorum meorum.*

As we have said, the souls in purgatory, through their guardian angels, know what happens on earth in their families, and all that is being done for them. That is the opinion of Suarez and many theologians—an opinion confirmed by various revelations; but it is probable that they do not know the future—the *contingent future*—unless God makes it known to them by a special revelation. The souls in purgatory know one another; they know their relations and friends, and it may be that this knowledge in some way diminishes or increases their sufferings. They know they are saved, and how long they must remain in purgatory if no one intervenes on their behalf.

Many theologians believe that the souls in purgatory know their own faults after the particular judgment, and that this knowledge excites their remorse. They have also a vivid remembrance of the glory and majesty of God,

of which they have had a glimpse, though for an instant only, during their judgment.

Such are the opinions of theologians, confirmed by the revelations of the Saints. The Church, however, has not thought fit to pronounce judgment on most of these obscure questions. "Let us respect the darkness in which God has veiled the mysteries of the other life," says Mgr. Gerbet. "These mysteries are sublime, and our sight is too weak. We ask where purgatory is ; we may as well ask where is heaven, or hell, or the universe. May not souls and bodies be raised to a state which passes our present conception ? And can we say that the notion of place does not change in this transformation ? It is the same with time ; we measure it here by the sun, but who can tell whether what we call an hour appears shorter or longer in that region which is no longer earth, but is not yet heaven ? God has revealed to us all that it is necessary for us to know in order to fulfil our duties. If it is for our edification to speculate farther, let us welcome these faint glimpses that are given us, but without being over-anxious for further knowledge, and let us in any case accept our ignorance as part of the penance imposed on our impatience and curiosity."

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

PURGATORY ACCORDING TO ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES says that the thought of purgatory ought to console rather than frighten us, and he censures those persons who, when speaking of purgatory, draw attention only to the sufferings of departed souls, without speaking also of their perfect love of God and their union with the Divine will—a union so close and unchanging that it is not in their power to express the least impatience or discontent, or to wish for anything else than what God pleases to send them. Their sufferings are so great, it is true, that the greatest sufferings of this life cannot be compared with them ; but their inward happiness is such that no earthly happiness can equal it ; and we may well say that the state of souls in purgatory is more to be envied than feared. The holy Doctor strongly recommended people to read the admirable and seraphic treatise which St. Catherine of Genoa wrote by a Divine revelation. He said he had read it many times, and nothing written on this subject pleased him so well.

We propose to reproduce in this chapter some of the principal passages of this remarkable work, which is held in such high esteem in the Church.

As soon as a soul is separated from its body, and has been judged, it is sent to the place destined for it. If, then, it has died in mortal sin, it is sent immediately to hell, the only place for which it is fit. So with purgatory. The soul in a state of grace, which, separated from its body, is not in the state of perfect purity in which it was created, seeing in itself an obstacle to its perfect union with God, and understanding that that obstacle can only be removed by means of purgatory, at once accepts the inevitable with perfect willingness and submission. If God had not provided this means of removing the obstacle which stands in its way, it would suffer a torture worse than that of purgatory—a torture like that of hell itself—in being excluded from the presence of God, for whom it longs with all the strength of its faculties, with all the fervour of its love.

There is something more, for God, who is perfect charity, does not close heaven to anyone. He stretches forth His arms to us all, to receive us into His glory ; but the Divine essence is of such perfect and incomprehensible purity that the soul which is disfigured by the slightest stain would rather cast itself into a thousand hells than present itself in such a condition before His infinite holiness ; therefore, seeing the purgatory created by God for the purpose of purifying souls, it plunges therein with happiness, and accepts with gratitude, as a proof of His infinite mercy, this means of removing the stain which prevents it from being united with the only object of its love.

St. Gertrude in an ecstasy saw the soul of a nun who had passed her life in the practice of the greatest virtues. She stood in the

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presence of Our Lord, clothed in her religious habit, but not daring to raise her eyes to the adorable face of her Saviour : she stood in the attitude of a criminal, with downcast eyes, showing by her gestures her desire to withdraw from His presence. Gertrude, astonished at her strange behaviour, asked the reason. "Oh, God of mercy," she cried, "why dost Thou not allow this soul to come near Thee?" At these words Our Lord affectionately stretched out His arms, as if to draw her to Him, but she drew back with reverent humility ; and when St. Gertrude, more and more surprised, asked for an explanation, she replied : "It is because I am not yet entirely purified from the stains which my sins have left in me ; and even if God allowed me to enter heaven, I would not consent to do so, for, whatever I may appear to you, I know that I am not yet a worthy bride for my Lord."

The souls in purgatory, says St. Catherine of Genoa, cannot do otherwise than remain there patiently, because they know they are detained by the infinite justice of God. They are incapable of wishing or desiring anything but the satisfaction of that justice and the accomplishment of the Divine will ; and they are so perfectly willing to leave themselves in the hands of God, to do with them as He will, that they cannot allow any thought of discontent to add to their sufferings. But they live in God, from whom they would not be separated if they could ; they can neither commit sin nor acquire merit, and they rest absorbed in the contemplation of the infinite mercy of the Creator, who would draw all men to Him. I do not believe that, after the supreme happiness of the Saints in

glory, there is any happiness equal to that of these souls ; and it is always increasing, because the grace of God is poured out more and more abundantly as the work of purification goes on, and the obstacles which hinder the reception of that grace are gradually removed.

These obstacles, which are the result of sin, are like stains of rust disfiguring these souls, or like some foreign body which for a time hides from their gaze the glory of the sun. The fire, by its action, destroys this body, this rust, these traces of sin ; and then the soul, more and more exposed to the rays of divinity, becomes more susceptible of its mysterious effusions, and participates more fully in its light.

The ardent charity which animates the souls in purgatory keeps their wills in such perfect submission to the will of God that they are content to suffer, and do not look upon their pains as real evils. Nevertheless, those pains are so great and so terrible that no tongue can describe them, no imagination can conceive them. In order to have an idea of them, it is necessary that God, by a special favour, should enlighten the understanding in a supernatural manner, as in His great goodness He has enlightened mine. But whatever knowledge the intellect may have, the tongue is mute, and I confess I cannot find words to describe these things as I should wish. The view which God was pleased to give me has never left my mind. I have always retained the memory of it, as if it were still before my eyes, and I can tell something of it ; but no one will understand unless God give him the grace He has condescended to bestow upon me.

The sole cause of all the pains of purgatory

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is undoubtedly original sin and actual sin ; for God, having created the soul of the first man in perfect purity, gave it an instinct and a natural inclination to turn to Him. But original sin deprived the soul of this happy inclination, which was its most cherished possession, and actual sin increased the distance between the soul and God. The more wicked and corrupt it became, the greater the estrangement ; and God withdrew Himself farther and farther from it. As no good thing can exist but by the gift of God, who, being the sovereign good, communicates Himself to all His creatures in such measure as He pleases, and pours Himself out more or less on the reasonable soul, according as He finds it more or less purified from the stains of sin, the result is that, when a soul returns to the first purity of its creation, that happy instinct which it had lost returns to it with such a violent transport of love for God as its last and only end, that it is an unendurable torment for the soul to be separated from God for a single moment ; and this torment increases in the same measure as the sight and knowledge of that sovereign good increase in the soul.

We see, then, what the pain of the souls in purgatory must be ; although they can no longer sin, and although it is only the suffering they have to undergo to wipe away the stains of their sin that keeps them from that perfect union with God which they so ardently desire, yet the delay in their being admitted to His presence produces a pain like a devouring fire.

This fire is different from the fire of hell, only because in purgatory the will is always good and submissive to the will of God, whereas in

hell the damned, who are plunged in sin continually, and no longer capable of receiving the influences of the Divine mercy, are eternally in a state of rebellion against the will of God. The whole evil of sin consists in this corruption of the will and its opposition to that of the Creator. This fatal effect is so inseparable from its cause that the reprobate who are in hell because of the evil disposition of their will at the moment of their death, are always in a state of sin ; and that sin is not forgiven, nor ever can be, because repentance is no longer possible. Death fixes the will for ever, and the destiny of the soul is decided, whether for eternal happiness or eternal misery. The judgment of God is irrevocable, and man has no longer a free choice between good and evil, but remains for ever in the state in which death finds him. Thus, the reprobate, having been seized by death at a time when they were determined to sin, and sin for ever, remain eternally in the sin which they desired to commit, and for that they will be punished eternally.

It is not thus with the souls in purgatory, for, although, like the damned, they are in the midst of pain and torment, they have not, like them, the love of sin and the disposition to sin. Death found them in a state of sincere regret for their past offences, and these offences have been wiped out by their penitence ; so their pains are not infinite in their duration, like the pains of hell, but grow continually less. The hope of seeing God and possessing Him allays their pain, and keeps them bowed submissively under the hand of the Almighty, who chastens them only to glorify them.

Thus, being exempt from all sin, and per-

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fectly united with the Divine will, the souls in purgatory see God clearly—at least, according to the degree of knowledge that is given them—and understand how important is the full and perfect enjoyment of this Supreme Being. As this happy enjoyment is the sole end for which they were created, they have such a desire to be united with God that they are drawn instinctively and irresistibly towards Him.

It is difficult to find on earth any figure to illustrate the manner in which the soul feels and understands this desire ; but I will make use of a familiar comparison which occurs to me at this moment. Suppose there were in the world but one single loaf of bread, and this bread had the faculty of satisfying the hunger of all creatures in the world ; if man, who, while in good health, has always a desire to satisfy his hunger, could, without dying or falling sick, remain without food for a long time—if this man, I say, knew that this bread alone could satisfy him, would he not desire at least to see it, and would not his desire increase with his hunger, as long as the bread was not in sight ? If this man were condemned never to see this bread, he would represent to us the pain of the damned, who have no hope of ever seeing God. The souls in purgatory, on the contrary, are assured that one day they will be satiated with that Bread of Heaven which is our dear Saviour. They are at present deprived of it, and suffer a terrible hunger, but only during the time of their exile and expiation.

The existence of purgatory, with all its pains, is a striking proof of the infinite wisdom and mercy of the Almighty. I confess I am incapable of understanding this mystery ; I see

only that in greatness and intensity the pains of purgatory equal those of hell, and yet the soul that perceives in itself the slightest stain of sin accepts them as a special testimony of the goodness of God towards it, and counts all its sufferings as nothing, when it considers the imperfections and defilements that hinder the aspirations of its love. Thus the greatest grief of the soul in purgatory is to feel in itself anything which displeases the Divine Majesty, and to have voluntarily offended a God of such infinite goodness.

But at the same time I see in God a reciprocation of the affections of the soul, which I know not how to express. It is such that, when He sees this soul returning to the purity in which He created it, He sends forth rays of love which set it on fire, and draws it to Himself with irresistible force. The soul is so melted and transformed into God that it seems, as it were, to be only one with Him ; and this God of love continues to draw the soul to Himself, to set it on fire till He has restored it to its original purity.

When the soul feels itself drawn thus lovingly towards God, and, above all, when it understands by the light of the Holy Spirit that God thus draws it to Himself in order to bring it to its final perfection, and that He does so for love of the soul, it is seized with an immense desire to give Him back love for love, and to advance towards Him. But being kept back by the impediment of sin, and unable to follow this irresistible attraction towards God, the soul suffers a pain which no words of mine could express ; and in that is the principal punishment of purgatory. Yet in its love for God it

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takes no account of that pain. The greatest suffering of all, in itself a real martyrdom, is the opposition which the soul finds in itself to the will of God, which it sees burning with the most perfect and tender love for it ; and this Divine love and the look which accompanies it continue to draw this soul with such power and persistence that it seems as if God had no other occupation, and the reciprocal love which is kindled within it is so great and so fervent that the soul would willingly cast itself into a fire a thousand times more terrible if it could thereby remove the obstacle which separates it from Him.

Divine love has the same effect on the soul as fire on material things ; it purifies it more and more, and consumes and destroys all the stains and imperfections which disfigure it ; at the same time it throws the soul into an ecstasy in which it forgets its sufferings. And yet this inconceivable pleasure does not diminish in any degree the intensity of its pain. On the contrary, the love that it has for God, finding an obstacle to the realization of its desires, becomes the chief source of its suffering. In short, the souls in purgatory unite two things which seem to us irreconcilable : they enjoy an extreme pleasure and at the same time suffer cruel torments ; and these two effects do not neutralize each other.

Oh ! if these souls could purify themselves by acts of contrition, how soon would they be pure ! The clear knowledge they possess of their misfortune in being kept far from God, their last end and the only object of their love, would force them to make a thousand such acts, if that were necessary ; but God, in the unchangeable decrees of His justice, has

determined that their contrition shall not obtain for them the remission of a single farthing of their debt.

These souls do not murmur against this disposition of Providence ; on the contrary, they bless the loving mercy of God, who does not punish them in proportion to their deserts. They understand that, if God did not temper His justice with mercy in order to receive the precious Blood of Jesus Christ in payment, a single sin would call for eternal punishment ; so they endure their pains with perfect resignation, in entire submission to the Divine will. They are already so transformed into God that they would not escape from the least part of their punishment if they could ; they accept it, embrace it, remain in it, with a joy with which nothing on earth can be compared, and which increases as they approach the term of their expiation.

The most profound, the most absolute peace reigns in purgatory—grave, solemn, unchangeable. There are sighs, but not a single cry. These souls, says Mgr. Gay, gravitate towards their centre, like stars in their orbit, in silence and without interruption. *Dormiunt in somno pacis*. They sleep in the sleep of peace ; or, if they wake, they are as peaceful as if they were asleep. The slumber of a little child does not offer a more perfect spectacle of repose. We are reminded of an immense lake whose tranquil waters reflect the clouds that float in the nocturnal atmosphere above them. For they are in the night, and the Church prays that the day may come to them as a time of refreshment ; but their night is not dark or stormy—there is too much love there. Perhaps these souls are

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like stars in the night ; perhaps each is dark in its own eyes, but who knows if it does not shed light upon the others ? It is here that justice and peace have kissed each other. *Justitia et pax osculatæ sunt.* To all that justice wills, or says, or does, in purgatory peace answers, and peace alone ; these souls offer to God who purifies them the same *Amen* which the souls of the blessed in heaven offer to God who glorifies them. Their whole existence echoes the everlasting song of heaven—"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts."

Lastly, says St. Catherine of Genoa, the souls in purgatory are all lost in the thought of God, and think not of the flames that surround them. What torments them most is the intense longing which they feel, without being able to satisfy it, to see God face to face and enjoy Him ; and as it is in God and through God that they receive all their knowledge henceforth, they can have no thought but for Him, and they make light of all their pains in comparison with the joy of the vision of God. The faintest glimpse of this Supreme Being infinitely transcends all other joys and delights that we can imagine, and while these souls gaze fixedly towards Him, their joy does not diminish their suffering, nor does their pain lessen their happiness. So does the work of their purification go on under the action of Divine love, and when they have attained the degree of purity required by God of His elect, they are absorbed into the Divine Essence, their sufferings are over, and they are in eternal possession of the joys of paradise.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD, AND THE CONSOLING DOCTRINE OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

ST. BRIDGET, being transported in an ecstasy to purgatory, heard an angel say : " Blessed is the man who, while living in the world, helps the souls of the departed by his prayers and good works ; for the justice of God cannot lie, and it tells us that souls, after they leave this world, must be purified by the pains of purgatory or released by the good works of their friends."

The tears which are shed over the departed are pleasing to them, as St. Gertrude learnt from the soul of her brother. " Thy tears produce the same effect upon me as the sympathy of friends on a person in affliction ; these marks of charity are as grateful to me as are praise and congratulations to a young man from those who are dear to him " (*Life*, book v., chap. xv.).

But it would be a poor and fruitless kind of sympathy if we were content with outward manifestations of grief ; and therefore the Church, which, like a loving mother, is interested in the welfare of all her children, urges us to pray for the dead. She follows them with her prayers beyond the grave in virtue of the Communion of Saints ; she has composed an Office and instituted Masses and special

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prayers for the repose of the faithful departed ; she has set apart a day for the commemoration of All Souls ; and encourages her children to persevere for a whole month with their prayers of intercession, which she has enriched with countless indulgences.

The Communion of Saints is a mystical chain whose links are welded together by charity, maintaining and drawing closer the bonds which unite us on earth. *Ascendentes et descendentes*, ascending and descending, the angels are unceasingly occupied in distributing the fruits of this mysterious communion ; they carry to heaven and lay at the foot of the throne of God our prayers and good works, which descend like refreshing dew on the souls in purgatory ; and they bring down to us the gifts and graces obtained for us by the intercession of Saints.

By virtue of the Communion of Saints there is among the members of the Church a communication of good works and merits—not only of those which Jesus Christ, our Divine Master, has acquired for us, but also of those of all the just men who exist or have ever existed since the foundation of the world ; and we may understand in this sense the words of St. Paul : “ Let your abundance supply their want ; that their abundance also may supply your want, that there may be an equality ” (2 Cor. viii. 14).

“ The life of the Saints is sublime in its penitence and love,” says Mgr. Gerbet ; “ and if it is true that many of the faithful have not fulfilled all the penance that was due from them, it is equally certain that the Saints have done more than was required. The people of God kneel together round the Cross ; they are not all equally near, and they bring unequal

tributes of voluntary sufferings, often very light and easy to bear. But among these holy people at the very foot of the Cross is a company of devoted souls, whose penance in a great measure is pure charity, and who suffer much less for their own faults than for others.

“This superabundant penance cannot be without fruit. The idea of a single suffering well borne being lost is as inconceivable as the sudden extinction of a star in heaven. What would become of the moral order if we did not believe in the eternity of the least portion of good ; if, while not a grain of dust can be destroyed, we are compelled to believe that God will permit treasures of holiness to be lost for ever ?

“We see, then, that what is supererogatory as an act of penance is always serviceable as a good work ; the debt of justice is limited, but there is no limit to the capacity of love ; and the merit of works done beyond the requirements of justice overflows into this unlimited capacity, which preserves all that it receives and enhances the value of all that it preserves. But are these good works of no profit except to those souls whose desire for expiation passes the limits of what justice has assigned them ? Such a limitation of their usefulness does not seem reconcilable with what we know of the designs of God. The least atom in creation, imperceptible though it may be to us, is not useless to other atoms ; the least vapour exhaled by the earth rises to add its tribute to the reservoir in the clouds, from which shall descend the fertilizing rain.

“The principle of union acts with less force in the material than in the spiritual order, for if bodies coalesce with one another, souls are still

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more intimately united. Whatever does good to one member of a closely united family does good to all; every member feels the happy result. And yet in the order of purely human affections the principle of union acts with less force than in the domain of charity. In charity there is attraction without matter, friendship without selfishness; there is everything that tends to union, nothing to separation; it is, in fact, that union which nothing can surpass but the ineffable union between the Eternal Father and the Son, of which Our Lord speaks in His prayer 'that they may be one, as we also are'—*Ut sint unum sicut et nos unum sumus* (St. John xvii. 11)."

Who shall unveil all the hidden mysteries of the mercy of God? Who shall enable us to see, or at least to understand, that wisdom, that incomparable goodness, which gathers together as in a reservoir the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and the satisfactions of the Saints to form a treasury of indulgences from which we may continually draw for ourselves or for the souls of our brethren in purgatory? What a privilege is ours, and how marvellous is the union produced by charity! Neither distance nor death can break its bonds, or separate a soul from the souls of its brethren, unless it voluntarily severs its relations with them by descending to evil. The man who dies in a state of grace is for ever bound by the sweet bonds of love. Whether he be holy enough to enter at once into paradise, or whether he have need of being purified by suffering, he is still in communion with us: our acts of virtue give him joy; our prayers and good works help him in the place of expiation, or from the

abode of bliss bring down upon us the effects of his protection. The glorified children of Christ are associated with Him in His triumph as in His sufferings ; and since even in His triumph He is still High-Priest and Mediator, they form a circle of intercessors around Him.

The Saints in heaven never lose their interest in the labours and struggles of men on earth, or their compassion for the suffering souls in purgatory. Their perfect charity constrains them to help the former and to comfort the latter by their prayers, as being all members of the same body ; and we in our earthly pilgrimage rejoice in the happiness of the Saints ; we sing their praises and celebrate their feasts ; but we also sympathize with the sufferings of the souls in purgatory ; we shed tears at the thought of their torments, and comfort them by our prayers and good works.

The Church embraces all Christians in her majestic unity—those who are still on earth and those who are no longer here. Death, which removes them from this world, does not remove them from her love ; and, though they are kept waiting for a time outside the gate of happiness, they are still her portion, her heritage, her family ; they are her children, and her heart is touched by their joys and their sorrows alike. But if it is a joy to the Church to contemplate the innumerable legions of her martyrs, her virgins and confessors, she considers it a sacred duty to pray for those of her children who are not yet sufficiently purified to enter into glory. Her constant care is to shorten the time of their expiation ; and such is her solicitude that seven times a day she makes mention of them in the Divine Office,

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and wherever an altar is erected, no priest ever offers the holy Sacrifice without a memento for the departed.

Every year on the 2nd of November, when the leaves have fallen from the trees, and are shed like tears of sorrow on the cold and lifeless earth, the Church commemorates all the faithful departed, and leads us to those graves, neglected though they may be, nevertheless, which contain the best part of ourselves. On the beautiful Feast of All Saints this loving Mother reveals to our longing eyes the heavenly city, where those who have fought the good fight have received their crown of victory; and the next day she invokes our pity for those who have still to pay the debt they owe to the justice of God before they can enter into their glory. To the songs of victory, whose echo comes to us from heaven, succeed the plaintive voices that arise from the desolate regions of purgatory. It is a happy and sublime idea thus to bring together our suffering brethren and those who are in glory, to hold us, as it were, suspended between joy for the happiness of the latter and compassion for the former; to bind together by chains of love the three Churches—militant, suffering, and triumphant. That religion is surely Divine which knows the human heart so well, and unites all under the soothing influence of sympathy and affection.

There is such a potent charm, such sweet consolation, in the Church's belief in the efficacy of prayers for the departed, that Protestants have been converted by this dogma alone. "I knew a Lutheran," says the Comte de Wals, "who was induced to embrace Catholicism by the doctrine of purgatory. He had lost a dear

brother in the midst of a festal gathering, and the thought of this sudden passage from merry-making to the grave was a perpetual grief to him, for he knew what perfect purity was necessary for heaven, and in his own religion he could find no intermediate place between heaven and hell. He could not be comforted ; his friends and his physician recommended him to travel, and he followed their advice. One day he confided to me his trouble—the death of his brother, of whom he had been very fond, and his own anxiety for the fate of his soul. When he had been instructed in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, he said : ‘ I shall become a Catholic for love of my brother ; when I can pray for him, I shall breathe freely once more. I shall live to pray that he whom I loved so dearly on earth may be happy in heaven. Your religion enables you to help one another after death ; your prayers break the terrible silence of the grave. You who are in communion with those who are gone before know what human weakness is ; and God has revealed to you a place of expiation between heaven and hell. My brother, perhaps, is there, and I shall become a Catholic in the hope that I may help to deliver him, and so find consolation and relief from the weight that oppresses me.’ ”

Prayer is the breath of the soul ; and when we stand by the side of the grave and see all the melancholy accompaniments of the funeral—the earth cast upon the coffin, the heavy slab which hides our dear ones from sight for ever—all these things would be heart-breaking if we had not the consolation of prayer. As the sun at its rising drives away the darkness of

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night, so does prayer dispel the gloom of our sorrows, and open the view of heaven to our tear-dimmed eyes.

This consoling belief in the efficacy of prayer for the departed is not in the Catholic Church a simple opinion, but an article of faith: the Council of Trent defined it, and the Council of Lyons had imposed it on the faithful long before. One of its decrees runs: "If men die truly penitent in a state of grace, before having made satisfaction for their sin by worthy fruits of penance, their souls are punished after death by the pains of purgatory; and they may be delivered from these pains by the suffrages of the living—that is to say, by the sacrifice of the Mass, by prayer, alms, and other works of piety, which the faithful are accustomed to offer for their brethren according to the institutions of the Church."

The Council of Trent says: "The Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, has always taught in her Councils from the sacred writings and the ancient traditions of the Fathers, and this Synod has now recently declared that there is a purgatory, and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar" (Sess. 25).

St. Thomas confirms and develops this consoling doctrine. The works of the living, he tells us, are profitable for the dead, for charity, which unites the members of the Church and establishes a communion between them, extends not only to the living, but to those who have died in a state of grace. Charity is the life of the soul, as the soul is the life of the body, and, St. Paul tells us, "Charity never falleth away" (1 Cor.

xiii. 8). Moreover, as the dead exist still in the memory of the living, the intention of the living may be directed towards them ; and as, according to our intention, the works that we do for others become, as it were, their property by a sort of gift, the prayers of the living are profitable to the dead for two reasons—first because of the union of charity ; and secondly because of the intention directed in their favour (Suppl., q. 71, a. 2, 5, 6).

We must not think, however, that any prayers of the living can change the final condition of the dead, and enable them to pass from the torments of hell to eternal happiness, for, the damned not having that charity in virtue of which the works of the living extend to the dead, it is evident that these prayers cannot help them at all. But they are profitable to the souls in purgatory, and procure for them deliverance or alleviation, because the pains of purgatory have for their object the completion of the satisfaction which the departed have not fully made while on earth, and the works of one may help another both during life and after death (St. Thomas,¹ Suppl., q. 71, a. 1, 2, 5, 6). The souls of those who have quitted this earth in a state of grace, says St. Augustine, are not separated from the Church ; they belong to the kingdom of Christ, and we cannot deny that the souls of the departed are helped by the sacrifices and alms of the living (St. Augustine, *In Enchir.*, c. cx.).

The angelic Doctor bids us observe that prayers offered for the departed have a double value and a twofold effect. By virtue of that charity which unites all the members of Jesus Christ, each soul receives as much profit from

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the prayers offered for all the departed as if they were offered for it alone, because charity loses none of its fervour or intensity when its fruits are divided among many—nay, more : it expands and increases, as joy is greater when common to all.

But if we consider the value of prayers and good works as satisfaction for the dead, it is undeniable that they are more profitable to those for whom they are offered, and God distributes them according to the laws of His justice (St. Thomas, Suppl., q. 71, a. 12).

We must also observe that a state of grace is not required for the satisfactory merit of prayers and good works, and they are always profitable to the souls in purgatory, even when made in a state of mortal sin ; they are, however, more fruitful and more profitable when united to grace and charity in a heart which is pure and pleasing to God. Fervour also adds to their effect. *Suffragia a peccatore facta ex opere quidem operato semper prosunt ; ex opere vero operantis, etsi non prosint quatenus a peccatore fiunt, prosunt tamen quatenus ipse vel Ecclesiæ personam gerit, vel ut alterius instrumentum agit* (St. Thomas, Suppl., q. 71, a. 3).

St. Thomas lays down also that prayer, almsgiving, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and Holy Communion, are particularly efficacious for the help of the departed ; since, the dead being helped by the suffrages of the living by reason of the intention and the charity which unites them, it follows that works which imply a more intimate communication of charity, or a more special direction of the intention in favour of some particular person, must by that very fact be more profitable to the departed. The

Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the highest expression of the union of charity, because it is essentially the sacrament of union in the Church, and Our Lord Jesus Christ is present therein. It is the source and the bond of charity, of which alms-giving is the principal effect ; and therefore the sacrifice of the altar and the practice of alms-giving are specially profitable to the souls in purgatory. But if we consider the intention, it is certain that prayer is a great help to them, because prayer, by its nature, not only implies, like other good works, a relation with the person who prays, but it refers more directly to the thing we ask and the person for whom we pray (St. Thomas, *Suppl.*, *q.* 71, *a.* 9).

The holy Fathers are unanimous on all these points, and Christians in all ages have believed in the efficacy of prayers and good works for the departed. We have, as St. Augustine tells us, the high authority of the Universal Church, of that Church which commemorates the faithful departed in the prayers she addresses to God at the holy altar. This practice is very ancient, and goes back to the time of the Apostles. St. John Damascene says : " The disciples of Our Lord and the holy Apostles established the custom of commemorating in our holy and awful mysteries those who have gone before us with the sign of faith."

St. Dionysius the Areopagite, who was a contemporary of Our Lord and His Apostles, has preserved for us the rite according to which prayers were made for the dead in the first ages of the Church : " The venerable prelate approaches, and recites the sacred prayers over the deceased person, entreating the Divine

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mercy to pardon whatever sins he may have committed by human frailty, and grant him a place in the region of light and peace." St. Clement, the fourth Pope, says: "St. Peter used every day to exhort the faithful to be careful to give decent burial to the dead, to pray and obtain the prayers of others for the repose of their souls; so high a value did he attach to that work of charity, and so anxious was he that the living should help the souls which were languishing in the flames. . . . Let the third day after death be consecrated by the recitation of psalms, lessons, and prayers for love of Him who rose again on the third day; and let the same be done on the ninth and fortieth day, according to ancient usage. Lastly, let us celebrate the anniversary in memory of the deceased person, and let alms be distributed in his name."

St. Athanasius, in the fourth century, wrote: "The suffering souls are greatly consoled by the perfume of our prayers and the odour of the unbloody sacrifice which is offered for them, and take their flight more quickly to heaven." St. Ephrem, on his death-bed, said: "My brethren, when my soul has left my body, go along with me in psalms and in your prayers; and please constantly to make oblations for me. When the thirtieth day shall be completed, then remember me, for the dead are helped by the offerings of the living" (*Testament of St. Ephrem*).

St. Jerome is equally explicit; in his commentary on the second chapter of Proverbs he says that the faithful may after death be absolved for their lesser faults which remained unexpiated at the time of death, either by the

pains which they suffer, or the prayers and alms of their friends, or the celebration of the holy Sacrifice. St. Ambrose, speaking of his brother Satyrus and his friends, says : " As long as my heart shall beat in my breast, as long as I can raise my eyes and hands towards heaven, I will not cease to pray for their souls."

St. John Chrysostom consoled his disciples for the pain of separation by the Christian hope that their prayers would benefit the dead : " Is the sinner dead ? It is proper to rejoice that an end is put to his sins, that they can no longer be accumulated. And now it becomes a duty, as far as we are able, to aid him, not by tears, but by prayer and supplication, and alms and offerings. Nor were these means lightly devised ; nor is it in vain that in the sacred mysteries we mention the dead, imploring for them the Lamb that there lieth, and that taketh away the sins of the world, begging that He will impart some consolation to them ; it is not impossible that we may obtain a complete pardon for them. Why, then, this continual grief and lamentation, when you know you can obtain such great graces for those you mourn ?" (*Hom. 41. in Ep. i. ad Cor*).

St. Augustine says : " It cannot be denied that the souls of the dead are relieved by the piety of the living, when the sacrifice of Our Mediator is offered for them, or alms are distributed in the Church. This tradition of our ancestors was observed by the whole Church ; throughout the world prayers and sacrifices are offered for those who have died in the Communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (*In Enchir., and Serm., 34*).

The Church in heaven shows the same in-

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terest in the souls in purgatory as the Church on earth, for it is in heaven, above all, that love and charity reign. The angels themselves, whose only desire is to glorify God, willingly give their aid to the suffering souls.

St. Frances of Rome one day during prayer was carried in spirit to purgatory, that she might see the different punishments inflicted on the holy souls detained there. She saw their guardian angels ascending from that place of expiation, and offering to Our Lord the sacrifices and prayers and good works done on earth in favour of those souls by their surviving relatives and friends. God then gave to the angels graces corresponding to the merits of the gifts offered to Him, and the angels applied them to the suffering souls in order to alleviate their sufferings.

The nuns of the Convent of St. Catherine, at Naples, had a pious habit of reciting every evening the Office of the Dead for the relief of the departed. This practice was as precious to purgatory as it was blessed by heaven. But one day some extraordinary occurrences had prolonged the work of the community until a very late hour of the night, and the nuns went to sleep without having said the Office. While they slept, angels descended from heaven, and took their places in the choir, singing the Office of the Dead with heavenly harmonies. The Venerable Sister Paula of St. Teresa was awake, and at prayer in her cell. Surprised by the unusual music, and thinking that the community must be assembled in the choir, she hastened to the church. What was her surprise to see angels equal in number to the number of nuns supplementing their work of charity, so that

the departed should not be for one day deprived of the benefit of the Office! Moved to tears by this manifestation of sympathy by the angels with the poor souls in purgatory, the venerable servant of God vowed to be particularly fervent from that day forward in prayer for the faithful departed (*Life of Ven. Paula of St. Teresa*).

Heaven and earth, then, are united in one thought, one common effort, to appease the justice of God, and contribute to the relief of the suffering members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

“What a splendid picture,” says M. Joseph de Maistre, “is that of this immense City of God, with its three orders of souls, all in the most friendly relations with one another! The body militant holds out one hand to the body suffering, and with the other grasps that of the body triumphant. Nothing is done for self; but prayers, thanksgivings and offerings, faith, hope, and charity, circulate among them like streams of refreshment and consolation.”

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

THE ADMIRABLE VIRTUE OF GOOD WORKS AND
PRAYERS FOR THE SOULS IN PURGATORY :
ACCORDING TO THE REVELATIONS OF THE
SAINTS

ONE day, as St. Gertrude was praying for the repose of a soul which had been recommended to her, Our Lord said to her : " I take special pleasure in the prayers that are offered for the dead, when natural compassion is combined with that good-will which renders it meritorious, and these two things co-operate to give to that good work all the completeness and perfection of which it is capable. The prayers of the faithful descend upon the souls in purgatory every moment with the effect of a refreshing dew or a healing balm. The exercises of piety, the mortifications and good works offered with a right intention for these afflicted souls, help them, and in time effect their deliverance, more or less rapidly according to the zeal and devotion shown on their behalf, and according as they have merited it by the practice of Christian charity during life " (*Life*, book v., chap. xix.). " When anything is offered to Me for the faithful departed, I apply it immediately, in accordance with My natural inclination to show mercy and pardon, whether for their consolation, the remission of their faults, or for the

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increase of their eternal happiness, considering the condition and the merit of each " (book iii., chap. lxvi.).

On another occasion, after having recited with the nuns of her convent the Psalter and Office for the Dead for the faithful departed, the same Saint asked Our Lord why He was so well pleased by the recitation of those psalms, and why the souls received such help and consolation from it, considering that this long repetition of psalms and prayers is more likely to produce weariness and distaste than fervour and devotion. The Divine Master answered : " My affection for the souls in purgatory, and My desire to see them delivered from their sufferings, make Me approve of everything that can contribute to their relief. I am like a prince full of affection for some of his subjects who have been thrown into prison by his authority and for good reason, and yet unwilling to use his sovereign power to pardon them, and thus interfere with the ordinary course of justice ; but quite ready to show mercy if some noble of his Court would intercede, and make satisfaction for the offenders. Thus I willingly accept all that is offered me on behalf of the souls in purgatory, and make it an occasion to release them from their sufferings, and put them in possession of everlasting happiness. You must know, however, that, although the recitation of the Office gives great relief to these poor souls, its fruits are more abundant, and its effect more certain, if it is accompanied by fervour and devotion." " But, Lord," said St. Gertrude, " is the labour of reciting the Psalter agreeable to Thee ?" " Be sure that I am well pleased with it," said

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Our Lord; "and when a soul obtains its freedom by the help of your prayers, I feel the same joy as if I had delivered it Myself; and I shall not fail to reward you for your devotion in due time in a manner worthy of My sovereign power and goodness." St. Gertrude asked again: "How many souls, O Lord, does Thy mercy condescend to deliver in answer to the prayers of each of us?" "I deliver more or less," replied the Divine Master, "according to the zeal of each nun and the fervour of her prayers" (*Life*, book v., chaps. xviii. and xxi.).

"The Psalms of David," says Mgr. Gerbet, "are like a mystical harp hung on the walls of the true Sion. Under the breath of the Spirit of God its harmonies roll on and echo from soul to soul, awakening in each a sound in unison with the sacred song, swelling and rising like the universal voice of penitence. And why should we not believe that these sacred hymns are not only for the use of those who still live in the light of the sun, but are known and enjoyed by others also? Why should we think that souls which have left this world of trial, but are still detained in the place of expiation, have forgotten the inspired words of the psalmist? Why should not those souls utter the inward meaning of those sacred songs, even if they can no longer articulate the words of their earthly language, which are but the mortal envelope of thought? I love to think that they do not die away before they reach the gate of that blessed home where human nature is purified from all stains of pride and earthly desire, where all sorrow and discord for ever are lost in the heavenly harmony inexplicable

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to earthly thoughts, the harmony of sacrifice and pure delights, of humility and glory.”

The soul of man has never known any language so capable of expressing its love and devotion as the Book of Psalms ; every sentiment of the human heart finds utterance on the lips and harp of the royal Prophet. He who knows the number of the waves of the sea, and the tears that fall from the eyes of men ; who hears the sigh of the mourner before it is breathed—He alone can say how many pious thoughts, how many lofty aspirations, have been and will be produced by those sublime strains, those sacred hymns which are read and sung and meditated upon at every hour of the day or night, in every part of this valley of tears. How many souls at the sound of that Divine psalmody have entered into possession of the joys of heaven !

A holy Bishop named Brentano was accustomed to recite every day the seven penitential psalms for the souls in purgatory. On one occasion he was kneeling beside a grave in a cemetery reciting them as usual, and at the end of every psalm, as he repeated the versicle *Requiescat in pace*, he heard voices from under the earth answer, *Amen* (*Bagata*, book ii., chap. i.).

Father Conrad of Offida, a Franciscan, was praying one night before a privileged altar, when a brother of his convent, who had died a short time before, appeared and asked the priest to pray for his deliverance. He immediately said the Lord's Prayer and *Requiem Æternam*. “Father,” said the grateful soul, “if you knew what consolation that simple prayer has given me, your pity for my condition

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would compel you to repeat it." The good friar repeated the same prayer many times over, and at the same time saw a look of relief on the face of the dead brother, which gave place to an expression, first of contentment, and then of intense joy. His garments became shining and white as snow, and after thanking the friar a thousand times, he ascended, beaming with joy, to his eternal home (Bartholomew of Pisa).

Like prayer, alms and good works are most useful to help the souls in purgatory. We are told in Holy Scripture that "alms deliver from all sin and from death"—*Eleemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat* (Tob. iv. 11)—and we have seen that what one man does for the intention of another transfers all merit of the act to the person for whom it is done. We must therefore believe that alms have a special virtue in quenching the expiatory flames which are the punishment for sin, and from this belief arises the pious custom common in Christian families of distributing alms to the poor on the death of one of their members.

A procurator of the monastery of Fulda who had neglected to give the alms prescribed by the rule of his Order on the death of every religious was punished in the following manner : One evening as he passed through the choir he saw all the monks who had died during his term of office ; they began to reproach him for his negligence, which had detained them in purgatory for want of the alms required to effect their deliverance, and warned him that in three days he would himself have to undergo the punishment he deserved. Struck with terror and remorse, the poor man fell unconscious to the ground ; he was carried to his cell,

and there, refusing all human aid, he asked that the Superior might be sent for, to whom he confessed his fault, and after receiving the sacraments of the Church, died full of contrition.

Some days after, the soul of the unhappy man appeared to the Abbot of the monastery, and said to him : “ I thank you, father, for the alms you have distributed to the poor for my benefit ; but God, in His justice, has applied the merit to those who were detained in purgatory through my neglect. Do not relax your efforts, for I must remain in this prison of expiation until all my brethren are released.”

Holy Scripture tells us, “ Water quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins ”—*Ignem ardentem extinguit aqua, et eleemosyna resistit peccatis*” (Ecclus. iii. 33). Now, purgatory is a fire, the consequence and fruit of sin ; therefore alms may mitigate its violence or extinguish it altogether. Oh, if we knew all the virtue of almsgiving, especially of alms offered to God for the souls in purgatory, we should give none without that intention, and we should give as often as we had the power ; for besides the help we thus procure for the poor and the souls of the departed, Jesus Christ tells us, “ Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me ”—*Quod uni fecistis, mihi fecistis* (St. Matt. xxv. 40)—and He has promised that for every sacrifice we make He will reward us a hundred-fold in eternity.

“ It is not in vain,” says St. John Chrysostom, “ that oblations and prayers are offered and alms given for the dead. So has the Divine Spirit ordained things that we might mutually assist one another, that the living should render

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service to the dead, and the dead to the living. The dead receive an advantage from you, and return another; for you give your worldly goods to hasten the deliverance of those souls, and they are the cause of your acquiring the merit of almsgiving. Do not doubt that they derive much benefit from it."

"Who can recount," says St. John Damascene, "all the testimony given in the lives and revelations of the Saints, from which it is made abundantly clear to us that the departed are greatly helped by the prayers, Masses, and alms offered for them on earth?"

One day, when St. Gertrude was offering her prayers and good works to God for the faithful departed, she saw the angels collecting them and presenting them at the foot of His throne, under the form of rich and splendid gifts. The Saints in heaven rejoiced greatly, and Our Lord also was pleased to receive the gifts with special benevolence, as if glad to have something wherewith to help the suffering souls. He even added something to each of the good works, and then, having applied them according to the intention of the Saint, He sent them back to her, multiplied a hundredfold, that she might carefully keep them, and receive the reward of them in the other life. St. Gertrude knew from this that, far from losing her time in doing good to her neighbour and the holy souls, she was laying up a great store of merit for herself before God.

We see from these revelations how useful are our prayers and good works offered for the departed, both to them and to ourselves; how merciful is Our Lord Jesus Christ; and how grateful for everything offered to Him on

behalf of those poor souls that He loves so much, and whose separation from Him is so painful to Him. If we seriously considered our own best interests, we should not pass a single day without offering something to God for the holy souls in purgatory. Our sufferings, our labours, our ordinary everyday actions, our Rosary, our Way of the Cross, all our prayers and communions, and, above all, the holy Sacrifice of Mass, all combine to help our dear dead friends, and bring down upon ourselves a copious shower of graces and blessings. But, alas ! many people neglect and forget this pious practice ; perhaps they do not know how wonderfully useful it is, for all its simplicity ; and thus how many good actions and prayers are lost, how many souls continue to suffer that we might have helped, while we have prayed and worked without intention and without profit ! Those souls for whom we might have procured admission to the courts of heaven would be praying for us and protecting us against the dangers which threaten us at every moment, instead of being left to suffer without help or consolation ; and perhaps they are the souls of parents and friends and benefactors to whom we owe all we possess.

Let us, then, make up for our culpable neglect in the past, and every day make a resolution to offer up all our prayers and works and sufferings for the poor souls in purgatory. Let us not neglect any of the means placed at our disposal to help them. The least prayer, a single "Hail Mary" said for them, may give them the greatest consolation. One day, as St. Gertrude, confined to her bed by a violent fever, was repeating the angelical saluattion, the

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Blessed Virgin appeared to her, surrounded with glory, and clothed in a mantle studded with flowers, and said to her : " You see there are as many flowers on my mantle as there are words in the prayer you have just addressed to me, and I shed their brightness on the souls that have prayed to me, in order to render them pleasing to my Divine Son." We may judge from this the value of the Rosary which is composed of a great number of " Hail Marys," and which the Sovereign Pontiffs have enriched with numerous indulgences applicable to the faithful departed.

A young girl, who had been released from purgatory by the prayers of St. Dominic, appeared to that illustrious servant of Mary, and said to him : " In the name of the souls in purgatory, I conjure you to preach throughout the whole world devotion to the holy Rosary, and exhort the faithful to apply to those poor souls the indulgences attached to it. The Blessed Virgin and the angels rejoice at this devotion, and the souls set free will pray in heaven for their deliverers."

The devotion to the Five Wounds and the Way of the Cross are also very profitable to the souls in purgatory, not only by reason of the many indulgences attached to them, but also because of the meditations they contain on the sufferings of Our Lord. St. Augustine says that every tear shed in memory of the Passion of Jesus Christ is worth more than a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and a year's fasting on bread and water ; and St. Gertrude, in one of her revelations, assures us that whenever a person looks with love upon the crucifix, Jesus returns the look with a truly fatherly affection. Our

Lord is particularly touched by this mark of gratitude ; He loves to see men moved by the thought of the agony He suffered for them, and He is disposed to give everything to those who come to the foot of His Cross to show their compassion with His sufferings, and their gratitude for the immensity of His love.

The pious Mary d'Antigna for a long time continued the practice of offering the Way of the Cross for the departed, but after a time she grew less regular in her devotion, and at last gave it up altogether. Our Lord, who had great designs on this good soul, and wished to make her a victim of love for the consolation of the poor souls in purgatory, appeared to her one day and said : " My daughter, I am greatly distressed by your neglect ; you must know that the Way of the Cross is most profitable to the souls in purgatory, and it is because you formerly practised it so regularly that you have been privileged to hold frequent communication with the departed ; and these grateful souls cease not to pray for you and plead your cause before the tribunal of My justice. Make known to your sisters the treasure of merit contained in this devotion, and tell them to draw from it largely for themselves and the departed."

CHAPTER THE NINTH

THE HOLY MASS AND HOLY COMMUNION FOR THE SOULS IN PURGATORY: ACCORDING TO THE REVELATIONS OF THE SAINTS

OF all the good works that we can offer for the benefit of the souls in purgatory, the most excellent and the most profitable are the holy Sacrifice of Mass and Holy Communion.

Who can doubt the precious and salutary effects of Holy Communion? Our Lord says to those who do the things that He commands them: "I will not now call you servants, but I have called you friends"—*Jam non dicam vos servos, vos autem dixi amicos* (St. John xv. 15). And when the soul, clothed in innocence and burning with love, flies to the arms of Jesus and pours out all her trouble to Him, offering herself entirely to this loving Saviour, what favour can be refused her, what chains of purgatory can resist the burning tears that she sheds on her Saviour's breast? Even an earthly friend could not be insensible to such an appeal; and shall we insult Jesus, our God, who proclaims Himself our best friend, by representing Him as less charitable than a mere mortal? *Vivo autem jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*—And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me, says St. Paul (Gal. ii. 20). It is Jesus Christ who prays in the soul to appease the

wrath of His Father ; it is He who “ asketh for us with unspeakable groanings ” in the heart that receives Him. How great is the virtue of Holy Communion !

The learned and pious Louis de Blois relates in one of his works that the soul of a deceased person appeared one day to a servant of God, surrounded by flames, and told him that it suffered most cruel torments because of the lukewarmness and carelessness with which in life it had received Holy Communion ; and added that if he would once offer his Communion for its intention, it would be immediately released from the pains of purgatory. The pious man, taking pity on the state of this poor soul, complied willingly with the request, and next morning the same soul again appeared to him, radiant with joy ; and, promising never to forget him in its prayers, took its flight to heaven (*Monil. Spirit.*, vi.).

The brother of St. Magdalen of Pazzi appeared to her after his death, and told her that he needed a hundred and seven Communions to release him from purgatory. The Saint gave him what he desired, and the soul of her brother was immediately consoled, and in due course released from his sufferings.

If the efficacy of Holy Communion is so great, what must be the virtue of the august Sacrifice of the Mass, in which the priest holds in his hands the Victim of propitiation, and renews upon the altar the Sacrifice of Calvary ! The merit of the Divine Sacrifice does not depend on the holiness of the priest who offers it, still less on the holiness of the person who causes it to be offered, but solely on the Sacred Person of Jesus Christ and the price of His Blood.

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Whether the minister of the altar or the person for whom the Mass is offered be in mortal sin or in a state of grace, the Sacrifice is equally valid, for God sees in it only His beloved Son.

Jesus Christ offers Himself to His Father by the hands of the priest, as He did on the Cross, with all His wounds, all His sufferings, all His Blood—a Divine Sacrifice of infinite value, for the Victim offered and immolated is God Himself. A story is told of a great captain, who, being overtaken by a terrible storm at sea, took a young child in his arms, and, lifting him up towards heaven, offered him to God to avert the danger. In an instant the sea became perfectly calm. If such is the power of the innocence of a simple child over the Heart of God, how great must be that of the perfect holiness, the infinite and spotless purity, of the Son of God Himself! Thus the holy doctors tell us that, as the Passion of Jesus Christ was enough to redeem the whole world, even so one single Mass is enough to save it.

“All the good works in the world put together,” said the Blessed John Vianney, Curé d’Ars, are not equal to the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of men, but the Mass is the work of God. Martyrdom is nothing in comparison, for it is but the sacrifice of man to God; but the Mass is the Sacrifice of God for man.” A holy priest was offering Mass one day for a friend whom he believed to be still in purgatory. At the moment of consecration, he took the Host into his hands, and said to God: “O holy and eternal Father, let us make an exchange: Thou holdest in Thy power the soul of my friend who is in purgatory, and I hold in my hands the Body of Thy Son; do

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Thou deliver my friend, and I offer Thee Thy Son with the merits of His passion." Immediately afterwards he saw the soul of his friend ascend to heaven.

St. Jerome assures us that when Mass is said for a soul in purgatory, it ceases to suffer during the time that the holy Sacrifice lasts: *Animæ quæ sunt in purgatorio, pro quibus solet sacerdos in missâ orare, interim nullum tormentum sentiunt dum missa celebratur.* The same holy Doctor declares that at every Mass that is said many souls are released from purgatory and fly to heaven—*Missâ celebratâ, plures animæ exeunt de purgatorio.*

A soul in purgatory appeared one day to a monk in prayer, and said to him, "I am condemned to purgatory for fifteen years; help me by your prayers and sacrifices." The following day the monk said Mass for the intention of the deceased with so much piety and so many tears that next day at the same hour the deceased appeared to him again, thanking him for his charity, and telling him that Our Lord had deigned to remit the whole of the punishment to which he had previously been condemned.

St. Antoninus relates that the sister of St. Thomas Aquinas appeared to him after her death, and begged him to say a Mass for her. The Saint did so without delay, and immediately saw his sister's soul ascend to heaven.

Thomas de Catimpré tells a story of a very pious monk who was saying Mass for the souls in purgatory. When he came to the words, *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem*—Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, give them rest—he heard a chorus of voices crying out from afar, "Make

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haste, make haste to receive the 'pax,' for the Mass is almost finished!" At the moment of Holy Communion, when he held in his hands the sacred Body of Jesus Christ, he was rapt in an ecstasy, and saw a great crowd of souls coming to receive the "pax." As they withdrew after receiving it, others cried, "Make haste, for the Mass is nearly finished!" And thus the monk stood before the altar from early morning till nine o'clock; he then finished his Mass, and, by order of his Superior, related to the rest of the monks the story of his ecstasy and his vision (*Bonum univ. de Apibus*, book ii., c. v.).

Although the fruit of the Sacrifice of the Altar is infinite, like that of the Sacrifice of the Cross, which it renews and perpetuates, and souls are often released from purgatory by a single Mass, we must not conclude that it is so for all souls, and that it is enough to have one Mass said for each person deceased. As St. Thomas says, although the virtue of the Mass is infinite, the application which God makes of it is necessarily restricted, and proportioned to the fervour and piety of those who offer it and those for whom it is offered. St. Bonaventure expresses his opinion on this subject in similar terms.

We must not, then, be satisfied with having one Mass said when we lose a friend, but as many as possible, in order not to leave our dead friends in danger of being detained for a long time in the expiatory flames.

We read in the *Life* of St. Elizabeth of Portugal that her daughter Constance, who died suddenly a few days after her marriage with the King of Castile, sent her a message by a hermit that she was condemned to a long and rigorous

purgatory, but that she was certain to be delivered at the end of a year if the holy Sacrifice were offered for her every day. St. Elizabeth immediately employed a priest to say the Masses asked for, and a year afterwards her daughter appeared to her, rising in glory to heaven.

Pope St. Paschal I., having granted precious indulgences applicable to the souls for whom five Masses should be said in the Church of St. Praxedes in Rome, himself said five Masses in that sanctuary for one of his nephews who had recently died. While he was still at the altar on the fifth day, he saw the Blessed Virgin deliver the young man from purgatory, and lead him to heaven.

St. Gregory the Great, in order to increase the devotion of the faithful to the souls in purgatory, introduced during his pontificate the salutary practice, which still is associated with his name, of having thirty Masses said for the dead on thirty consecutive days, a practice subsequently recommended and enriched with indulgences by Innocent XI., Benedict XIII., Benedict XIV., and Pius VII. (Garantus, Ferraris, and De Herdt). If the thirty days include the last three days of Holy Week, when private Masses are forbidden, the Masses must be continued after those three days, account being taken of those omitted; but in all other cases they must be on consecutive days.

This pious practice originated in the following manner: A monk of the Order of St. Benedict, on his death, was in possession of six crowns, contrary to his Rule, and was in consequence deprived of Catholic burial. Nevertheless, as he died penitent, St. Gregory, who was Abbot of the monastery, ordered Mass to be daily offered

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up for him for thirty days ; and he tells us in one of his dialogues that after the Mass of the thirtieth day the monk appeared to his brother, and assured him that he had been in torments, but was then released.

In the Capitularies of the Kings of France it is ordered that relations and friends should fast and make offerings for a deceased person for thirty days. At the Abbey of Fulda, for the same space of time a deceased monk was considered as present in the refectory, and his portion was given to the poor for the good of his soul. Blessed Louis Bertrand offered fervent prayers and severe penances for one of his brothers in religion, and had the satisfaction of seeing him ascend to heaven on the thirtieth day. The Arch-Confraternity established in Rome for the relief of souls destitute of spiritual aid prescribes the celebration of thirty Masses on the death of each member.

Thus the Church has always encouraged and recommended frequent prayers and repeated offering of the Holy Sacrifice for the departed, and hence has arisen the pious custom of consecrating the month of November to the holy souls.

We help the souls in purgatory by being present at holy Mass ; for although, strictly speaking, only the ministers of the altar can really offer the Divine Sacrifice, yet we may say that, as, in the words of St. Peter, all Christians are " a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people " (1 Pet. ii. 9), all the faithful present at Mass in a certain sense offer the Sacred Victim. The priest, in fact, says in the Commemoration of the Living, " Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy servants, men

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and women, N. and N., and of all here present whose faith and devotion are known unto Thee, for whom we offer, *or who offer up to Thee, this sacrifice of praise*. These words shew plainly that the faithful offer to God the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in union with the priest, with this difference : that the priest offers it with his own hands, while the people offer it by the hands of the priest. It appears clearly, says St. Peter Damian, that this sacrifice of praise is offered by all the faithful, though it seems to be only the priest who offers it ; for what he touches with his hands all the people offer with him by the active direction of their minds and the intention of their hearts (*De Myst. Missæ*, book iii., c. vi.). Again, in the Commemoration of the Dead, when the priest addresses to God the prayer, " To all that sleep in Christ, grant, we beseech Thee, a place of repentance, light, and peace," all present may offer the same supplication for their own friends and relations deceased, and their prayers, united in Jesus Christ with those of the celebrant, will bring down upon those poor souls a heavenly dew of refreshment and consolation.

Our Lord revealed to St. Gertrude that every time a person devoutly assists at Holy Mass, united in heart and soul with the adorable Victim offered on the altar for the salvation of all, the Eternal Father looks down on that person with all the love merited by the Sacred Victim Himself (*Life*, book iii., chap. xviii.). Such, also, is the teaching of the Church ; those who piously assist at the Holy Sacrifice receive a special share of the superabundant fruits of the Passion of Jesus Christ, a more considerable application of the merits of His Precious Blood.

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Another and powerful means of helping our departed friends is by devotion to the sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our Lord Himself condescended to reveal to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque the devotion to His adorable Heart, and promised many precious favours to those who should come to the foot of His tabernacle to satisfy His burning thirst to be honoured by men, assuring her that he would abundantly pour forth the riches of His Heart on those who should pay Him this homage, and visit Him in the Sacrament of His love. Let us, then, cultivate a pious and tender devotion to this Divine Heart, and answer the affectionate appeal that He makes to us. What will He not do for us, and for those whom we commend to His fatherly care, if we do for Him what He so earnestly desires ?

Let us be constant also in our prayers to the Blessed Virgin ; let us be sincerely loving children of that good Mother. She will not fail to help those dear ones on whose behalf we implore her charity, and she will send them her sweetest consolations by the Angels who surround her. Mary, as she revealed to St. Bridget, is the Queen of purgatory, and often visits the souls that are detained there. Will she, then, ever forget those for whom we cry to her ? Will she forget the vows, the tears, the prayers of her faithful and devoted servants ? No ; she whose heart is full of compassion and mercy will never be deaf to the voice of her children ; she will call to her side the souls for whom we mourn, will extinguish the flames that surround them, and bring them into the kingdom of the elect.

Let us try every day to gain all the indulgences

we can for the holy souls, remembering that many simple prayers and acts of devotion, within the power of all sorts and conditions of men, are enriched with most precious indulgences, and therefore to be preferred to others, because by their use the souls in purgatory will receive the greater benefit. In short, if our prayers and good works by themselves are useful to these poor souls, is it not reasonable to believe that the indulgences which are the application of the merits and satisfactions of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints, are more profitable still?

St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi had by her charitable services consoled the last moments of a Sister of her Order, who during the whole of her life had been the admiration of the community; and the other Sisters fervently recited for her the ordinary prayers for the dead, and offered for her all the indulgences they could gain during the day. The body was still exposed in the Church, and as Mary Magdalen was gazing at it affectionately through the grating near which she stood, she suddenly saw the soul of the deceased nun issue forth from the mortal remains and rise gloriously to heaven to receive her immortal crown. At the same moment Our Lord appeared to the Saint, and told her that that soul owed her speedy release from purgatory to the indulgences applied to her. From that time forward the nuns never missed an opportunity of obtaining indulgences for the dead. Let us imitate those pious virgins, and redouble our efforts for the relief of the souls in purgatory.

There are two devotional practices that are particularly rich in spiritual favours: the Way

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of the Cross and the recitation of six "Our Fathers," "Hail Marys," and "Glorias," in honour of the Most Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin Mary, for the exaltation of the Church, the extirpation of heresies, etc., by members of the confraternity of the Blue Scapular of the Immaculate Conception. Those who perform the Way of the Cross can gain all the indulgences accorded to a personal visit to the holy places at Jerusalem, and all these are applicable to the souls in purgatory. How easily we can help these poor souls! Who is there that cannot make the Way of the Cross once a week? or say the six "Our Fathers," "Hail Marys," and "Glorias," several times a day? Walking, travelling, working, it is easy to follow this simple and useful practice. Thus, instead of wasting our time in idleness or dissipation, how many suffering souls we might help or deliver every day! What a satisfaction to be able at the close of a day to be able to say that we have done really great acts of charity, and earned the gratitude of many holy souls, perhaps of many of the elect, who will henceforth be our advocates with God.

We will conclude the chapter with some reflections of the Rev. Father Maurel, taken from his remarkable work on indulgences. "The Church," he says, "does not apply indulgences to the dead as she applies them to the living by way of judgment and *absolution*, but only by way of *suffrage*, intercession, help, and offering. The Church, having no more jurisdiction over the dead, who are no longer under her government, but are in the hands of God, cannot directly *absolve* them from their pains. But she remits them indirectly; that

is to say, in consequence of the indulgence gained by the living and applied by them to the dead, the Church takes from the treasure that she possesses the portion of merits and satisfactions which corresponds to the indulgence gained, and offers it to God, imploring Him to help the holy souls to that extent. For a plenary indulgence the Church takes all that is necessary to efface entirely the penalty due to the sins of the person to whom the indulgence is applied, since a plenary indulgence is one which remits the whole penalty due to sins, and a partial indulgence remits a part only. If God, then, accepts the offering made to Him by the Church, the souls in purgatory to which the indulgence is applied receive a remission, plenary or partial, of the temporary punishment they have still to undergo. And we have the best reason to believe that God does in fact accept it, for is not the dogma of the Communion of Saints sufficient warrant for this belief? Are not the merits of Jesus Christ, Mary, and the Saints, infinitely dear to the Heart of God? And is not the Church which offers them the beloved Spouse, the holy and immaculate Spouse, of His Son? When the Church offers and prays, may we not say it is the Holy Ghost who offers and prays in her and by her, inasmuch as it is He who inspires prayer and teaches us to pray?

“But Our Lord has not explicitly promised to accept the price which is offered Him, the acceptance being dependent on the designs of His adorable perfections, and perhaps also on the care which the dead took during their lives to render themselves worthy of this help. On the other hand, a person desiring to gain an in-

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dulgence for the dead may by ignorance or forgetfulness have omitted one or more of the conditions prescribed, or have imperfectly fulfilled them ; and we cannot then be absolutely certain that the indulgence applied to this or that soul in purgatory has obtained its full effect." So we ought never to cease from gaining them, and applying them to our friends departed, and to those souls in general that suffer in the place of expiation.

CHAPTER THE TENTH

THE EXCELLENCE OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY TOWARDS THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

WE cannot think enough of our dead friends, says St. Francis of Sales, and the proof that we do not think of them enough is that we do not speak of them ; we avoid such conversation as if there were something gloomy about it. It might be said that our remembrance of the dead ceases with the sound of the funeral bells. Oh, those dear dead friends ! We are far too forgetful of them, and yet they loved us so fondly when they were alive.

It must be confessed to our shame that there are none so quickly forgotten as the poor souls of those who are lost to sight ; the memory of those who were most dear to us is often painful, because it brings back to us the thought of death with its heart-rending separations, and so we put it out of our minds.

Forgetfulness is an inevitable law of our nature, and whether we will or not, it will come upon us sooner or later. Forgetfulness is natural to us, and when a man under the influence of some strong emotion promises a constant and eternal remembrance, he promises, says Bossuet, much more than he is able to fulfil. It is certain, then, that as we forget those who have gone before us, we shall be

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forgotten by those who come after us. It is a sort of hereditary punishment which is transmitted from generation to generation, and which men inflict upon one another the very day after they have made the most solemn promises of eternal fidelity. Who is there that has not said to some person to whom he is much attached, as the generous Peter said to Our Lord, "Although all shall be scandalized in thee, yet not I?"—*Etiam si omnes . . . ego non !* (St. Mark xvi. 29), and yet who is there that has not been unfaithful, and perhaps forgotten next day the oath of love and fidelity that he has taken for ever? In spite of all a man's good will and all his solemn promises, forgetfulness comes over him as if to punish him for his neglect of his most sacred obligations. It is written that he who forgets shall be forgotten, and his memory shall pass away like a shadow.

What happens in most cases where people lose a friend by death? They mourn, and weep, and are inconsolable at first; and then there is the funeral to be thought of, and all its accompaniments; and sometimes, with the praiseworthy Christian reverence for the dead, there is a considerable mixture of vanity and ostentation, and human pride must be gratified even at the brink of the grave. Then for a few days there is weeping, and that is all; the sepulchral stone is like an eternal wall of separation. Then, says St. Bernard, we see the dead mourning for the dead; we see men alive, but living only for the world, and so dead in the sight of God, mourning bitterly and sincerely for the dear ones they have lost. But what is there in all this? Many tears and few prayers (*fletum multum et fructum nullum*),

lamentations without effect, immoderate grief without fruit. Truly, adds the same Saint, those who weep in this manner deserve to be wept over themselves—*et vere plorandi qui ita plorant*.

The abuses which St. Bernard condemned exist still ; we weep from affection, or because it is the proper thing to do, and we soon feel that by these tears we have done our duty to the departed. But no prayers, or very few, are said, and yet we are told “ It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins ” (2 Mach. xii. 46). We leave to the church the duty of praying for the dead, and think we have done all that piety requires of us if we have ordered a Mass to be said for the repose of their souls.

Alas ! we sometimes go further than this in the way of forgetfulness, relying, on the one hand, on the infinite mercy of God, who cannot (we say) without cruelty leave these poor souls to suffer so long, and, on the other hand, on the virtue and holiness of those for whom we mourn, and so we bring our prayers and sacrifices to an end. “ Oh yes,” we say in our inmost hearts (and it is a consolation that we need), “ my parents are in heaven ; they were so good that God, whom they always loved so much and served so well, could not leave them to suffer long. Oh, certainly they are in heaven.” And so comforting ourselves we go to sleep, as it were, on the graves of our dead ; the prayer dies on our lips, the fountain of affection dries up with our tears, and we are content to let them rest till the time comes when we must join them. But this is a dangerous and even culpable way of acting ;

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perhaps because of our neglect and our unreasoning affection our dead may have still to suffer for long years in the purifying flames.

But even if our relations, our friends, our benefactors are already in heaven, our prayers are not lost ; they help other poor souls who have none else to pray for them, and who will be eternally grateful to us. And who knows but among our own forefathers there may be some still in purgatory, who will reap the fruit of our prayers and good works ? God, no doubt, will apply them to these in preference to strangers. Moreover, as Christians, we are bound to pray for all the faithful in purgatory ; they are our brethren in Jesus Christ, our suffering brethren, who implore us to intercede for them. "The poor you have always with you," said Our Lord to His Apostles (St. Matt. xxvi. 11), and we, too, shall always have in purgatory poor forsaken souls, poor souls entirely forgotten by their own friends and relations. These are our poor, whom we shall always have to help.

Many Saints have adopted the pious custom of praying for those who have none to pray for them ; this was the practice of St. Vincent of Paul, and it is a great act of charity. Others have felt moved to pray specially for those who are nearest to the end of their sufferings, and for whom only one last prayer is needed to procure their entrance into glory ; that is a means by which we can glorify God at once, and at the same time provide ourselves with advocates in heaven. We may pray also for those souls which during life showed most devotion to Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and St. Joseph. All these intentions are excellent,

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but we must never forget our parents, to whom we owe all we possess, who showed so much love and care for us, and voluntarily made the greatest sacrifices for our happiness. That is a sacred debt, a rigorous obligation of justice as well as charity. Our first and most fervent prayers must be for our parents, our benefactors, and all those to whom we are indebted for spiritual or temporal favours—our superiors, masters, directors, and friends.

St. Epiphanius puts prayer for the dead before all other practices of piety ; and, indeed, we shall see that devotion to the suffering souls in purgatory is the best means of giving pleasure to our Divine Saviour and His Mother, the surest and most fruitful of apostolates, the most excellent act of charity that we can do for the good of our neighbour.

We are told in one of the revelations of St. Bridget that to deliver one soul from purgatory is to do a thing as pleasing to Jesus Christ as if we redeemed Himself, and in His own time He will reward us a hundredfold, and turn all our good deeds to our own profit.

We cannot better testify our love for our Divine Master, or labour in any manner more conducive to His glory, than by giving to Him through our prayers predestined souls who will praise and love Him for eternity. He loves these souls, and is loved by them ; He desires to have them with Him in everlasting bliss ; His tender Heart grieves for their mournful exile and separation from Him, but His justice, which has its rights as well as His mercy, keeps them in prison until they have paid their debt. These are the spouses whom He loves, and yet is obliged to condemn to suffering ; His love

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draws them to Him, but His justice keeps them at a distance. The voice of His mercy calls them, and says, "Come to me, beloved spouses, come and receive the crown of my elect," but the terrible voice of His inexorable justice pronounces these solemn words, "Amen, I say to you; you shall not go out from thence till you have repaid the last farthing," words as painful to the loving Heart of Him who utters them as they are awful to the poor souls that hear them, but words Divine, words eternal, words which must have their fulfilment to the end.

Thus the pains which the souls in purgatory endure are inflicted more in sorrow than in anger, and if God's justice compels Him to punish, His mercy desires to find someone who will turn away His wrath. We can only marvel at His great love for those poor souls, and His ardent desire for their deliverance. Once it has quitted this world, the soul has passed from the state of trial and merit; it can do nothing for itself, but must submit to the justice of the Most High. Infinite mercy in its dealings with this soul is bound by the inexorable laws of eternal justice. The omnipotence of God, which enables Him to work miracles for the salvation of so many sinners, is as it were paralyzed for this poor soul. There is no longer any but a God of inflexible justice. Power and mercy are silent, and the voice of justice alone is heard through the realms of purgatory. But, O miracle of mercy! what God can no longer do by Himself, He wishes us to do for Him, poor and feeble creatures as we are; and thus, placing at our disposal all the fruits of the Passion and the Precious Blood shed on Calvary, all the

merits of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, He urges us to draw from this treasure, He encourages us to offer our prayers and mortifications and good works for the souls that are so dear to Him.

Let us imagine a father who refuses to receive the embraces of his son, and forbids him even to come into his presence until he has shown contrition for the fault he has committed. What a joy it is to that father if some friend interposes on behalf of the culprit, and induces him to accept his son's excuses, and to be reconciled to the child of his love. The Word of the Lord came to the prophet Ezechiel, speaking of the general corruption of the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "I sought among them for a man that might set up a hedge, and stand in the gap before me in favour of the land, that I might not destroy it; and I found none" (Ezech. xxii. 30). What comforting words! and if the heart of a father is the most perfect picture of the Divinity, do we not see God's dealings with men exemplified in the father who is compelled by respect for the law to show a stern face to his rebellious child, and yet encourages those around him to come and intercede, so as to give him an opportunity of forgiving?

We are the friends, the mediators who have the power of obtaining pardon for those souls tried by the justice of God. God desires nothing better than to grant our petitions; He is pleased by our prayers; He invites us to go on praying till we win the pardon we desire by our persistence. If, then, we love God, let us not neglect such easy means of procuring His glory. He is a just and jealous God; we may say also

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that mercy is the first of His perfections, and the one which He most delights to show. "*Misericordiam volo, et non sacrificium*"—I will have mercy, and not sacrifice (St. Matt. ix. 13 ; Osee vi. 6). No one is more a father than God.

The first, the greatest, the most important of all the commandments, as Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, is to love God. We must love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength. If we were as perfect as we ought to be, we should have no other occupation here below but that of praising God and doing His holy Will, no other desire but to please Him and procure His glory. The best way to fulfil this duty, since it is difficult for us to be always thinking of God, is to devote ourselves to the release of the souls in purgatory. In this way we shall send to heaven souls inflamed with love, who will stand day and night among the Seraphim before the throne of God. What happiness for us ! And what glory will God receive from the praises offered Him by those happy souls while we are still on this earth !

"Purgatory," says Father Faber, "is simply a field white for the harvest of God's glory. Not a prayer can be said for the holy souls, but God is at once glorified, both by the faith and by the charity of the mere prayer ; not an alleviation, however trifling, can befall any one of the souls, but He is forthwith glorified by the honour of His Son's Precious Blood, and the approach of the souls to bliss. Not a soul is delivered from its trial, but God is immensely glorified" (*All for Jesus*, p. 387). God is so great, so good, so perfect, so infinitely holy, that He deserves

to be loved and honoured as much as we are capable of loving and honouring Him. The soul which really loves God as it ought thinks of nothing but God, and the means to procure and increase His glory ; it looks round on all sides, and grieves to see His holy Name blasphemed, and His love despised and rejected ; then it lifts its eyes to heaven, and sees the blessed occupied only in gazing on God, loving and glorifying Him. As it burns more and more with love of God, it fervently wishes that all men knew Him, loved Him, and glorified Him ; and it sighs : “ What would I not do or suffer that God might be honoured and loved as He deserves ? ” It thinks of the numerous ways of helping the souls in purgatory, of obtaining their admission into paradise, where they will see God clearly like the rest of the elect, and love Him with all their strength, and never cease to sing His praise through all eternity ; and it redoubles its prayers and sacrifices and good works for this intention, in order to give to God the honour and the homage due to His Divine Essence and His adorable perfections.

Moreover, the numerous faults that we have committed have often and gravely outraged the majesty of the Most High ; they have wounded His heart and diminished His glory. Justice and love demand some reparation, and we ought to do our utmost to give back to our offended God the glory of which we have robbed Him, to make amends for the insult we have offered Him, and to wipe out the stain of our ingratitude. Now, we have no better means of doing this than devotion to the souls in purgatory ; we thus expiate our own offences, since in opening the gates of heaven to these

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souls we give God through them the same honours as the celestial spirits offer Him ; we bless and praise Him with them, or rather we put them into our place to bless and praise Him.

Thus the love we owe to God, the obligation which lies upon us all to advance His glory, makes it a duty for us to pray for the souls in purgatory. Gratitude imposes a further obligation. When we think of all that God has done for us, all that our Blessed Saviour has suffered for love of us, we must feel an intense desire to show our gratitude, and when to this consideration we add that of all the inward graces and special blessings we have received from His bounty ; when we think that these priceless gifts come from a God of infinite holiness and majesty, a God who has no need of us, and whom we have often offended ; when we think that God delights in bestowing all these gifts upon us in spite of our faults, and all for our good, we feel that we owe Him eternal gratitude, and, humbled at the thought of our poverty and weakness, we repeat with the Prophet, "*Quid vis ut faciam ?*"—Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? In return for all Thou hast done and still continuest to do for me, what can I do for Thee ?

Our prayers and thanksgivings, it is true, are very poor while we are on the earth ; but we can send to God faithful messengers who will bear to Him the homage of our hearts, and will stand before His throne, occupied only in thanking and blessing Him for us. We have seen that God desires nothing so much as the deliverance of the souls in purgatory, and the loving Heart of Jesus, who shed all His Blood

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for them, who calls them to Him, and who suffers still in these predestined souls, because He loves them so much and His spirit rests in the midst of them, is filled with joy every time one of these souls enters its heavenly home. How can we better pay Him our debt of gratitude, our tribute of praise and adoration ?

The deliverance of the souls in purgatory gives equal joy to the maternal heart of the Blessed Virgin. We know how kind she is, how anxious for the welfare of her children on earth, and still more for those who are suffering in purgatory ; she never ceases to make intercession for them, and puts into the hearts of the faithful the wholesome thought of praying for them. How great, then, must be her happiness when one of those dearly-loved souls, freed from its bonds, ascends to heaven to praise God for all eternity ; how grateful she must be to those who have given her that joy by delivering the soul whose sufferings so afflicted her loving heart !

Devotion to the holy souls is an apostolate within the power of all, for all can practise it without leaving their own homes. Who is there that has not thought at some time in his life of giving up all for God, of leaving his home, his relations and friends, of making himself an exile from his country, and going forth to brave privations and dangers among far-off barbarous people, to preach the Gospel and convert souls ? But it is not given to every man to follow these noble aspirations, and the vocation of an apostle or a missionary is the privilege of very few. Yet we have always an easy means of making up for the absence of this gift which has been denied us, and of realizing the holy desires

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of our zeal without danger or hardship by exercising an apostolate in the bosom of our own family ; and that is by praying for the souls in purgatory, and offering for them all our good works and all the indulgences we can gain. There are forsaken souls whom we have not to convert, or to bring to the true faith, but to put in possession of eternal happiness. For this work we have no need to cross the ocean, to penetrate pathless forests, to study unknown languages : prayer and almsgiving will gain us the victory.

And is not this a sublime and fruitful apostolate, worthy of all our efforts ? In working to glorify these souls, it is Jesus that we glorify. If in speaking of the greatest of sinners our Divine Master said, " As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me " (St. Matt. xxv. 40), with how much more reason does He not say it of these dear suffering souls ! They are His ; there is no longer any fear of their being lost ; the trial is over, and Satan is vanquished. Jesus has won them for Himself ; He keeps them, and will keep them for ever. We work then with certainty of success, we run no risk of failure, we do not waste our labour on those who are unworthy of it, and this thought must be our strongest encouragement.

The work of the missionary who gives up his life to bring souls out of the darkness of sin is a noble, a glorious work ; it is the continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and it will be crowned in heaven. Yet what is too often the result of this zeal ? A soul is won to-day at the cost of the greatest efforts, but where will it be to-morrow ? The shepherd seeks the lost sheep,

and brings it home rejoicing ; but how long will it remain in the fold ? or will it return only to die ? How often does the work end in disappointment ! But here nothing is lost ; the earth in which we sow is always fruitful, and every grain that falls brings a harvest for heaven. It is this which makes many people say that however sublime and meritorious is the conversion of sinners, the work of the deliverance of souls from purgatory in some respects surpasses it—surpasses it in results because here success is certain, since by our prayers and good works we are sure of helping the souls that are dear to Our Lord ; surpasses it also in excellence, since the souls in purgatory, being holy and predestined souls, perfect and confirmed in grace, though detained for a time by slight stains which must be effaced by the flames, are more pleasing to God than the souls of pagans and infidels, and more capable of giving Him glory.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

THE EXCELLENCE OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY TOWARDS THE SOULS IN PURGATORY (*continued*)

THE deliverance of the souls in purgatory is the most excellent work of charity that we can do for our neighbour.

St. Francis of Sales tells us that in praying for the dead we accomplish all the acts of mercy, for is it not visiting the sick if by our prayers we obtain relief for the poor suffering souls? Is it not giving drink to those who thirst for the vision of God if by our prayers we bring down the refreshing dew of God's mercy on those in the midst of the flames? Is it not feeding the hungry if we hasten their deliverance by all the means that faith gives us? Is it not clothing the naked if we obtain for them a garment of light and glory? Is it not the best form of hospitality if we introduce them into the heavenly Jerusalem, and make them citizens of the eternal city of God? Is it not a greater service to put a soul into possession of heaven than to bury a body in the earth?

He who delivers a soul from purgatory, and opens for it the gate of heaven, gives it not the crumbs from his table, but the Bread of Angels, Jesus, with all the delights of paradise, for which it has hungered with a hunger with which no torment on earth can compare; he gives it not a cup of cold water only, but the fountain of

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water springing up to life everlasting, of that water for which it thirsts day and night, without being able to procure for itself the least refreshment. He does not take it into his own house like a passing stranger, but brings it into the heavenly home for which it has sighed so long. He clothes it, not in a garment which time will wear out or destroy, but in the robe of immortality which will protect it against heat and cold for ever. He visits it to help and console it, not in a slight and passing illness, but in the most cruel suffering in the midst of those pitiless flames which torment it without intermission. He goes, as it were, into prison to relieve it from its heavy chains, and put it in possession of the glorious liberty of the children of God.

On the day of the Last Judgment the Son of God will turn to the reprobate on His left hand, and pronounce upon them this sentence, which will plunge them into the deepest despair, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels ; for I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat ; I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink ; I was a stranger, and you took me not in ; naked, and you covered me not ; sick and in prison, and you did not visit me " ; and to the elect on His right hand He will address the gracious invitation : " Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ; for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat ; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink ; I was a stranger, and you took me in ; naked, and you covered me ; sick, and you visited me ; I was in prison, and you came to me " (St. Matt. xxv.).

As we see, Jesus Christ makes charity a sign

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of predestination ; devotion to the souls in purgatory is therefore also a mark of salvation. Who in fact is so tormented by hunger and thirst, who is so naked, so sick, or so closely imprisoned as the souls in purgatory ? They sigh day and night for the bread of Angels, they long to refresh themselves from the fountain of living water ; banished from paradise, they have nothing to clothe them but the flames of purgatory ; they suffer and groan, shut up in a prison of fire. To devote oneself to the relief of the souls in purgatory is equivalent to doing all the acts of mercy which Our Lord praises so highly, and so all our actions are transformed into works of charity, and all have the special merits of that excellent virtue.

St. Thomas assures us that prayers for the dead are more pleasing to God than prayers for the living, because the dead are in pressing need, and cannot help themselves like those who are still alive. It is good no doubt to go and search for the needy in attics and hovels ; it is good to distribute food and clothing to poor creatures shivering with cold and dying of hunger ; it is good to sit down in the midst of poverty and sickness and sorrow, to help with alms, and console with kind words the poor creature writhing on a bed of misery ; and yet the poor that we help are less to be pitied than the souls in purgatory. From the depth of their misery the poor can cry for help, and make their wants known ; they can hold out a suppliant hand to the passer-by ; they can beg for alms in the street ; and even if they are forgotten and left to weep over their sufferings in solitude, they have still one consolation, they can pray for death to put an end to their misery.

But the souls in purgatory can do nothing for themselves, nor even ask for a prayer, without the permission of God. They cannot acquire merit, says Suarez ; they cannot make satisfaction for their faults : *Animæ purgatorii non sunt in statu satisfaciendi proprie, sed satisfaciendi* (*De Purg.*, Disp. 2). They have neither sacraments nor sacramentals ; they are withdrawn from the merciful jurisdiction of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. If no one helps them, they remain there at the mercy of that river of tears and flame, which, in its imperceptible course, carries them onward, it is true, little by little, towards paradise, but, alas ! through what grievous suffering, and what a dreary time of waiting.

The human soul is something very vast and deep, and we wonder as we think how the most ordinary one can acquire knowledge, recall past impressions, form thoughts and opinions and resolutions. In purgatory every faculty of the soul, separated from the body, is, by reason of its condition, sensitive to pain, for pain resides not in the material or corporal substance, but in the soul, and the more the cause which produces it affects a sensible organ when the soul is united with the body, the keener and deeper is the sensation produced. Now, in purgatory the fire attacks the soul without the intervention of the body ; there is nothing to weaken its action or avert its effect. Everything that belongs to the soul, everything in it, is exposed to pain : pain covers all, penetrates all, fills all ; the whole soul is saturated with pain.

What a strange existence, and how much are these poor souls to be pitied ! There is no rest

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or distraction for them, no blue sky, no starry firmament, no radiant horizon, no green meadows, no flowers, no shade. Souls, souls, only souls everywhere ; beautiful no doubt, but all suffering, a spectacle of woe.

If they had only some occupation in which they might be absorbed, and so forget their pains ! But no, there is nothing to enable them to lose consciousness of their sorrowful condition for a single instant.

How, then, do they pass their time ? What do they think of during those long hours, those long years of captivity ? Ask a prisoner how each of his days is spent, and he will answer sadly that he thinks of nothing but the slow passage of time. Always alone, he will tell you, alone with my thoughts and my grief ; alone, far from the light, which never visits me ; far from men, who know me no longer ; far from hearts which no longer pity me, I look at the darkness, and I listen to the silence. Night and day, between these four walls, where I have no companions but solitude, and sadness, and darkness, I have nothing to do but suffer. I sit on the cold stone with my head between my hands, and go back over my whole life, and think of the happiness I have lost, the joyful days that are gone, and compare them sadly with the long hours of my misery. I measure the time by my sighs, like a sick man who counts the slow monotonous ticking of the clock during his long hours of sleepless agony, and I say to myself, " So many years, so many months, so many days, so many hours ! A hundred thousand hours I have suffered already, and I have two hundred thousand hours to suffer still ! A hundred thousand hours—two hun-

dred thousand hours ! tell me, can you understand what this suffering means ?”

If it is thus with the prisoners of earth, what shall we say of the prisoners of purgatory ? How much more are they to be pitied ! Detained by eternal justice in a prison of fire, they think with remorse of all the sins they have to expiate, and they cannot for a moment turn away their thoughts from that happiness from which they are for so long excluded, that happiness with which the joys of earth cannot be compared ; they think of God, so good, so great, so worthy of their love, so infinitely perfect, to whom they cry in all their prayers, to whom their whole being aspires as their end, their sovereign good, and their supreme happiness. And thus they suffer for hours, for years, for centuries it may be, turning over and over on their bed of pain in the anguish of their regret.

But who shall tell us what the passage of time is for these sufferers of the other world, or how it is measured ? Are the minutes and hours of purgatory like the minutes and hours of earth ? Is there any difference between day and night ? We know not. But no sun shines in that dismal abode, no light gladdens the eye ; no spring succeeds to winter, no summer crowns the spring. What an existence ! No rest, no sleep ; the soul watches ceaselessly through the endless night. Perhaps it has some perception of the feasts of heaven and earth ; one would like to think so. But what effect is produced on the heart of the captive by the distant echoes of song borne on the breeze to his narrow cell, save an increase of sadness and regret ? These poor souls are capable of loving ; they may adore and pray, remember and hope,

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but all they do implies suffering. If only the intensity or the long duration of their pains made them lose consciousness ! But no, a body may faint, and become insensible, but a soul never.

And yet how beautiful are these souls in the midst of their torments ! All are holy and pleasing to God, and therefore worthy of our compassion and charitable help. We cannot enter a prison without being touched by pity ; but when we meet among the prisoners a person of great beauty, of noble birth, bearing his misfortune with patience and dignity, our compassion is necessarily greater and deeper. So it is with the souls in purgatory ; all are beautiful, all are children of the Most High, heirs of the kingdom of heaven, and yet they are prisoners. Some are grievously afflicted, and look as if a long and painful illness had taken away the colour from their faces and the lustre from their eyes ; but they are still beautiful, and through all their suffering their natural grace shines still. Others, again, have such radiant beauty that we ask ourselves what more they need to enable them to enter into their glory. But all possess in themselves the image of God, Divine charity ; all are loved by God, and in their whole being appear the elements of a majesty and the principle of a power which nothing earthly approaches ; all are holy, for ever incapable of sinning ; they live for truth, and love, and justice, and for God. But what most touches us is the perfect patience and resignation of these poor souls, the recollection and abandonment with which they accept their sufferings. The sufferer who protests, and murmurs, and blasphemes, excites our indignation ; but he who

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humbles himself before justice, and blesses the hand that strikes him, rouses our sympathy, and we wish we could help him, and remove his pain.

This is what we find everywhere in purgatory in absolute perfection. These souls suffer, and meditate, and pray, without the power to gain anything for themselves ; they bow with resignation under the hand of God, and await with sighs the day of their deliverance. Is not this enough to induce us to interest ourselves, and show a generous compassion for them ? Perhaps there are some who are suffering on our account ; we have been the cause of their burning tears, their inconsolable grief. Here are friends, maybe, a wife, a husband, a brother, or a sister, whose companionship was the delight of our lives, to whom we swore eternal love ; here are benefactors who lavished their affection upon us, and bequeathed us all their fortunes, and now, not seeing the least drop of heavenly dew descending on their flames, they sigh over our indifference. “ Oh, hard, ungrateful hearts, that pass by our graves without once invoking upon us the blessing of God ! They leave us forgotten ; we are dead in their hearts as in their memories ! “ *Et non dixerunt qui præteribant Benedictio Dominis super vos ; benediximus vobis in nomine Domini.*”

There are children who raise their suppliant hands towards the authors of their being, and cry : “ Our father and mother have forsaken us ” (*Pater meus et mater mea dereliquerunt me*), “ and now who will remember and help us ? ” There is a fond mother, a too indulgent father, and we hear them sob : “ We have brought up children with the tenderest care, and have left nothing undone to provide for their happiness

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and comfort, and now they that are in peaceful enjoyment of every luxury, the fruit of our labours, these unnatural children trample underfoot the most sacred affections, and return us only indifference and neglect. *Filios enutrivisti et exaltavi ; ipsi autem spreverunt me.* Who will deliver us from these tormenting flames ?”

Let us think of those poor Christian slaves on the coasts of Barbary, who, when they saw from afar the flag of a Catholic state, greeted it with cries of joy, and stretched out their manacled hands, seeing in it the hope of speedy deliverance. So the souls in purgatory, which never cease to think of us and wait for our prayers, when they hear the prison-door open to admit the liberating Angel, imagine that he is the heavenly envoy of our prayers and sacrifices, and rush towards him, thinking the hour of their freedom has arrived. But, oh, vain hope ! they see other happy souls wing their flight to heaven, delivered by the piety of their surviving friends, while the gates still remain closed upon themselves. They turn back disappointed, and cry out from the midst of the flames : “ Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged !”—*Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est !*

Listen to that sad voice that rises from the depths of the abyss, the voice of a soul forsaken : “ Unhappy creature that I am, abandoned, forgotten by heaven and earth, I suffer in these tormenting flames. Oh, ye that pass by the way, behold and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow ! for He hath made a vintage of me, as the Lord spoke in the day of His fierce anger ; He has cast me into a fire which burns me through and through. I am

full of bitterness, and saturated with anguish, and my eyes are blinded with weeping. Who will deliver me from this prison of flames? I have left on earth parents, children, brethren, and they have all forgotten me, while I am paying for the zeal with which I laboured for their temporal welfare. I denied myself even necessities of life, I shortened my sleep, I neglected my religious duties to work for them. Ungrateful ones, what evil have I done you that you should treat me like this? I have given up everything for you, and you say not a single prayer for me. Such were not the promises you made when you stood sobbing round my deathbed; such were not the hopes you held out to me when you pressed my failing hands in a last farewell. *Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei, quia manus Dei tetigit me.* Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord has touched me. It is heavy upon me, and I am tormented in this flame. *Crucior in hac flammâ."*

Let us not be deaf to such touching and natural entreaties; let us pray unceasingly for these poor suffering souls, and offer to God our prayers and good works and sacrifices on their behalf. For the love of God, for the sake of Jesus and Mary, let us be generous to these poor souls, and remember that when we obtain their deliverance it is no ordinary alms we give them, but God Himself; not a God hidden or seen from a distance, but God seen face to face, and possessed for ever. We bring a new joy into the heaven of the blessed, for we make a new star to shine in that world of light, and add a new voice to the chorus of the elect.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

BENEFITS AND CONSOLATIONS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY TOWARDS THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

AN illustrious Christian of our time, Frederic Ozanam, had, according to his friend and biographer, Father Lacordaire, a very great veneration for his mother, of whom he never spoke but in terms of loving admiration. Her death caused him the most poignant sorrow, but after a time he was convinced, as he himself expressed it, of the continual actual presence of his mother ; it seemed to him she followed him still, and gave him inspiration, and rewarded him with sensible caresses, as in the days of his childhood.

This fact, however extraordinary it may appear, is reproduced in those who practise a Christian devotion to the holy souls. How many persons in the world may be said without any exaggeration to be continually thinking of the friends they have lost ! We have heard such persons say with the most perfect confidence : " Every time I pray for my departed friends, I seem to feel them near me, and the thought gives me the same pleasure as their presence during life ; it is as if there were only a veil between us, and the least effort would be enough to tear it down."

Whatever may be thought of these impres-

sions, we must admit that they are full of consolation, and that is something for those who mourn for friends they have fondly loved. What is better adapted to help us to support the anguish of separation than this feeling, at once natural and Christian, that all does not come to an end with this life, that the affection which has united two souls on earth endures beyond the grave? What is more consoling than to be able to say, with the certainty of faith: "Those dear friends for whom I mourn have only passed away from my sight for a few days, and I shall soon rejoin them; in the meantime they think of me, and are interested in all that concerns me. They know, through their good angels and my own, all that I wish to communicate to them, all that I do for them; they watch over me, they follow and protect me in all the dangers and trials of life."

Devotion to the souls in purgatory keeps always present with us the memory of our departed friends; while we pray for their souls, we seem to be in their company, seeing them and conversing with them. This consoling thought takes away its empire from death, its sting from the grave, its sadness and bitterness from bodily separation. There is nothing in the memory of the departed to terrify us; it is sweet to think of them as we kneel on the stone which covers their precious remains, among the flowers which the pious care of the living has planted above them.

Travellers tell us that in some Eastern countries the Arab goes often in the evening to the place where his dear dead friends lie buried, and there, wrapped in his wide cloak, he wanders along the

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dark paths of the cemetery ; then, sitting near a grave which he has covered with flowers and sweet-smelling branches, he remains for hours in sad and silent contemplation, seeming to commune with those departed souls. He thinks that in the breeze which dies with the dying day he hears faint heavenly voices rising and falling, calling him, speaking to him, caressing him, and then he cries out : “ Is it you, dear souls, whose golden censers pour out these perfumes on the night ? Is it the magic of your presence which gives this attraction to the spot where you lie asleep ? ” Motionless he sits, dreaming, listening to those voices, and his heart dilates, his grief is assuaged, and his tears cease to flow. This is his consolation, and he can have no other.

But we Christians, children of the true Church, have in our religion something more real, more consoling, more sublime ; we have, in a certain sense, the real presence of our dead in our churches. With what consolation the hours pass at the foot of the altar in the house of God ; with what confidence we can pray there for our departed friends, when we can say to ourselves : “ They are there before the eyes of Jesus, for Jesus sees them ; they are praying at this moment, their voices and their prayers mingle with our own as they rise to the throne of God ; they know we are thinking of them, weeping for them at the feet of Our Lord ; they receive the benefit of our prayers, and feel, as it were, a heavenly dew which falls and refreshes them, perhaps even sets them free. ” And then we speak to them, we converse with them in the Heart of Jesus, we listen and think we hear them, we receive their good counsel, and the

pious suggestions they put into our minds. We weep, but our tears are sweet, for we have just spoken with those we love. It seems as if they were still with us, as if they had never left us, and we go away comforted with the hope that they will suffer no more, or at least that their sufferings will be relieved.

In Christianity, says M. Nicolas, the Divinity itself being the centre of the Communion of Saints, and the infinite merits of Jesus Christ being the instrument by which it operates, we believe that all souls should be able to meet, and that spiritual society, the bond of which is love and truth, should take no account of space and time, of life and death, as we understand them in the temporal and visible order. Thus the real death which divides us is not so much bodily death as spiritual death, not so much the separation of soul and body as the separation of the soul from truth and virtue. We can be really nearer together, with immeasurable space between us, than when we lived together under one roof, less separated by the grave than by sin. In a word, to live is to share in that eternal life, which is God; and as that life is indivisible and immortal, all who share in it are united for ever. It is thus that the sublime and solid metaphysics of Christianity have broken down the barriers of time and death, and gathered together in the embrace of that same charity not only the generations now living, but generations which have long since passed away, giving them back to our love and hope in the bosom of God, which is the eternal home of souls.

Let us thank God for having left us on earth so rich a source of consolation, for having placed

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within our reach the balm which soothes our anguish and dries our tears, for having thus made endurable the bitterness of separation. Christian hope, which keeps the memory and the presence of the dead in the hearts of the living, sustains in life those who grieve for the loss of their friends, and strengthens at the hour of their departure those who go hence into eternity. How sweet it will be to think when dying that our friends and relations will remember us, and pray for us ; that we shall only be separated from them in the body, and that for a short time ; that we shall remain united to them in God by prayer and love ; that we shall know what they do, and watch over them. And so we shall die happy, consoled by Christian hope and Christian charity, for we shall leave only the trials and troubles of this sad life without being really far removed from those we love. Happy are those who die thus supported by faith, hope, and love, and fall asleep in peace in the arms of the Lord. *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.* What a consolation, too, there is for the survivors to know that they can help those for whom they mourn, that the tears they shed over those dear ones may be of service to them, and that in the unseen world of spirits affection may reach the departed, refresh and comfort them in their suffering, and put them in possession of the happiness of heaven.

A pious daughter long mourned her unhappy father, an ardent revolutionary, who was thrown into the Seine by two malefactors in 1793, and thus suddenly cut off by death in the midst of a life of sin. She lived a retired life in a village of Burgundy, and spent her time in

working for the poor and praying for her unhappy father ; though she had but little reason for hope, yet it was a consolation to pray. Several years after her father appeared to her, and asked that some Masses might be said for him, as he was in purgatory, God having given him the grace to make an act of contrition and utter a prayer for mercy as he was drowning. The pious girl went at once to the parish priest, and asked him to say Masses for her father, and to have as many more as possible said without delay. The good priest complied with her request, and Masses were said for the dead man by several priests daily. A few weeks after, the soul of the poor father again appeared to his daughter, but this time radiant with happiness, and said to her : “ I thank you, my child, for my suffering is over, and I am going to heaven.” What a joy for that good child to think that perhaps her piety and good works, and the prayers she had offered for her father, *foreseen by God*, had obtained for the poor guilty soul the grace of contrition which had saved him at the hour of death ! What consolation to all those in like sorrow !

If this heavenly doctrine and this pious devotion to the souls of the departed did not exist, we should have to invent them, if only to give us hope and consolation in our bereavement. Nothing transforms and transfigures the love of a mourner like this devotion to the memory and sufferings of the departed ; this mingling of religion and grief, of prayer and love, has something in it inexpressibly touching ; sorrow becomes the handmaid of piety, while piety in its turn sheds a sweet perfume on sorrow, and faith, hope, and charity unite in

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honouring God and comforting the living by the help they give to the dead.

But how much sweeter are our good offices made by the thought that God does not leave our departed friends in ignorance of all we do for them ! Who has not wished, when he has prayed for those he loves, that they were there to see ? Who has not said to himself, when he has wiped away his tears by the grave of a friend or relation : " If only he could hear me ! If only he could see me ! and when I offer sacrifice and prayers for him, if only I could be sure that he knows and understands how great is my love ! What happiness if I could be certain that God would reveal to him that his consolation comes from me ! "

This desire to preserve the bond with the departed is very precious ; it is an instinct of our immortal soul. It is our right and our duty not to allow our affection to be wasted in useless melancholy. Why then, when one of us is called by God to the other life, when we are separated by what human nature calls death, though it is not real death, do we not think more of the sacred bonds which unite this world and the next ? Why do we not cherish in our memory those dear ones who rest in the grave, but live in God ? Why do we not put away all mourning by the light of faith, by our belief in the Communion of Saints ? Is it not a sacred obligation for us who remain to unite ourselves by invisible bonds to those who are gone before, to accompany them in thought and prayer on their mysterious journey, in order to hasten, as much as we can, their entrance into their heavenly home ?

It is thus that God permits, nay, commands

us to enter into a communion of merits with those who have gone before us into His presence, to unite our will with their will, our supplications with theirs, to join hands with them, as it were, in order that we may come together into His fatherly presence. He declares that He is ready to receive our good works and prayers on earth, that He even desires to receive them, in order to satisfy the debt of our brethren in purgatory, and the surest way of obtaining His favour for ourselves is to pray Him to show favour to those poor afflicted souls. Surely He who has promised not to leave unrewarded the cup of cold water given to a poor man in His name, will not forget those who labour to bring into His presence the souls that He loves and calls to Him with infinite tenderness.

In procuring the release of a soul from purgatory we do a work which is greater than raising a dead man to life, for in restoring life to a dead man we do but give him a temporal existence, and subject him to a second death, whereas in delivering a soul from purgatory we procure for it eternal life, and place it in a position to love God as much as He desires to be loved. What joy ought we not to feel when we think that the souls delivered by our prayers are henceforth at the foot of God's throne, praising Him, loving Him, giving Him thanks for us, and that while we are still on earth they have already begun that act of adoration which will last for ever! It is beyond doubt that the souls which have the happiness of being admitted into paradise are holier than our own, and more fit for the contemplation of the Divinity; if, then, we succeed in bringing a soul into heaven, we have procured more glory to God than we could

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give Him ourselves. While we eat, and drink, and sleep, and work on earth, there are in heaven—Oh happy thought!—souls which our prayers have brought there, and which never cease to praise and glorify the Most High with a perfection surpassing all that we could imagine.

Besides the glory to God and the good to souls, besides the consolation to themselves, what precious blessings does this exercise of charity obtain for those who practise it! How it helps them along the path of virtue and perfection to contemplate the sufferings of the other life! It enables them to realize the justice and mercy of God, and the value of the Passion and Blood of Jesus Christ; it suggests the most powerful motives for practising detachment from the world and sin, and living for God alone. Yes, it is a holy and wholesome thought, as the Scripture says, to pray for the dead; it is an occupation abounding in consolations of all kinds and most pleasing to God, but it is also a source of merits and graces and blessings, and an easy and certain way of gaining heaven.

Every one of our good works, every act that we do for God in a state of grace, may have four kinds of fruit: first, a fruit of *merit*, secondly, a fruit of *propitiation*: thirdly, a fruit of *impetration*: and, fourthly, a fruit of *expiation* or *satisfaction*. In other words, every prayer and every good work is at the same time meritorious, propitiatory, impetratory, and satisfying or expiatory, so that the faithful soul which does such a work may by the same prayer ask and obtain a favour, appease the anger of God, merit an increase of grace on earth, and a

new degree of glory in heaven, and finally satisfy the justice of God by expiating its sins. Such is the teaching of the Church ; thus the man who prays for the souls in purgatory, and offers his good works and communions for their intention, does not deprive himself of all the fruits which his action may merit, but only of a part—that is, the fruit of expiation or satisfaction. He satisfies the Divine justice for the suffering souls ; he asks, and may obtain, their deliverance, but all the merit and propitiatory fruit of the act remain to him ; that is a personal benefit which he cannot give up, for from the moment that he acts according to the conditions required for supernatural merit, his action naturally acquires for him a right to the eternal reward promised to virtue, the good that he does appeases the wrath of God, and brings down God's favour upon him.

There is more besides. The gift that a man makes of his good works and indulgences in favour of the souls in purgatory, far from diminishing his merits, multiplies them a hundredfold in the sight of God. "When a man suffers for another for charity's sake," says St. Thomas (*Contra Gentiles*, book iii., c. lviii.), "the satisfaction or the penance that he offers is more pleasing to God than if he offered it for Himself." The merit of our actions, in fact, proceeds from charity, and the more charitable an action is, the more meritorious it must be in all respects to the person who does it. Now, we have seen that the voluntary relinquishment we make in favour of the poor souls in purgatory is one of the most excellent and perfect acts of charity, which ennobles and transforms all the acts accomplished for the same intention, and

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causes them to participate in its own merits, which are far greater than those of all other virtues. To offer our prayers and good works of every day for the relief of the souls in purgatory is to change acts of piety, humility, mortification, etc. — that is to say, acts of ordinary merit—into so many acts of charity, the most perfect and meritorious of all virtues. We gain more than we lose, and for everything we give in love to our neighbour, we lay up a hundredfold for ourselves.

From whatever point of view we look at this act of charity to the departed, we cannot fail to see the great advantage derived from it. It is true that all the expiatory fruit of works offered for the souls in purgatory belongs to those souls alone; but the generous act by which we renounce this treasure of satisfaction acquires a satisfactory virtue far greater than all the merits we give up. This act of charity to our neighbour is most excellent, and possesses extraordinary merit, as we have seen, and the satisfaction that it carries in it and with it becomes by that very fact most abundant. "If meritorious works," says Vasquez, "deserve eternal life and an increase of glory in heaven, why should they not also gain the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, since by the remission of this temporal punishment we enter more quickly into possession of glory? When a just man merits glory by his good works, and merits it in an extraordinary manner, he renders himself worthy not only of a new degree of glory, but of whatever makes it easy for him to enter into possession of it; he merits not only to enjoy eternal life, but also to be exempt from all that prevents him from enjoying it,

for if he is worthy of eternal life, he is still more worthy to escape from the pains which delay his happiness. Good works, then, have the virtue of satisfying the justice of God, and also of remitting the temporal punishment incurred by sin " (vol. iii. in 3 p., *q.* 94, *a.* 1).

Thus reasons this great theologian. Every good work which merits a high degree of glory, merits also a notable diminution or even an entire remission of the punishment which delays the enjoyment of that glory, and the more we please God by our good works, the more we atone for the insult offered to Him by sin ; for it is the quality of good works, while they merit a reward, to remit past faults, and efface all memory of them. Many learned writers teach that in every good work merit and satisfaction are always equal. According to this principle it is not rash to assert that the exercise of Christian charity towards the souls in purgatory, being highly meritorious in the sight of God, must also be most efficacious for the satisfaction or remission of the temporal punishment which we should have otherwise to undergo in purgatory.

Lastly, this act of charity to the departed is often inspired by such pure and sublime motives that it is transformed into an act of perfect love of God, which happens whenever, being urged by a fervent zeal for God's glory, we concentrate our efforts on the deliverance of souls from purgatory, in order to increase the number of the elect, and to swell the chorus of praise and adoration that is offered in heaven to the majesty and perfection of the Almighty. Such is the common teaching of theology, that every act of the love of God has the power to expiate

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and destroy sin. Our Lord said of St. Mary Magdalene, "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much" (St. Luke vii. 47). The wise man, also, in the Book of Proverbs says, "Charity covereth all sins" (Prov. x. 12); and St. Peter exhorts us to have constant mutual charity among ourselves, "For charity covereth a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. iv. 8).

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

BENEFITS AND CONSOLATIONS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY TOWARDS THE SOULS IN PURGATORY (continued)

WHEN we make a free gift of all the satisfactory merit of our prayers and good works in behalf of the souls in purgatory, we accomplish a spiritual work of mercy so excellent that it surpasses in merit and dignity all corporal works of mercy. The Scripture tells us that "Alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness" (Tob. iv. 11), and that "Water quenqueth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins" (Ecclus. iii. 33); and Our Lord says: "Give alms; and behold, all things are clean unto you" (St. Luke xi. 41). How, then, can we doubt of the merit of our spiritual alms when we release our neighbour from great suffering in order to procure for him infinite happiness; when we pay his debts and deliver him from prison, and so enable him to enjoy the presence of God, the object of all his desires, for all eternity? We may be sure that this excellent act of spiritual charity, which (according to St. Thomas) is as far superior to corporal charity as the soul is to the body, possesses the power of remitting all sins, purifying the soul, extinguishing the fire of purgatory, and

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giving possession of eternal life. Would God be less generous to those who for love of Him do such excellent and perfect acts than He is to those who give of their abundance to the poor ?

“Blessed is he,” says the Psalmist, “that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor ; the Lord will deliver him in the evil day ” (Ps. xl. 2). The day of death, which is the evil day for so many others, will be for that man a day of joy, for the Lord will deliver him from those pains from which he has done so much to deliver others, and will reward him a hundred-fold. St. Ambrose says : “ *Omne quod defunctis impenditur, in nostrum tandem meritum commutatur, et illud post mortem centuplum recipimus duplicatum* ”—Whatever we offer in charity for the dead is changed into merit for ourselves, and we shall receive a hundredfold after death. We need not, then, be afraid of exercising Christian charity towards the souls in purgatory ; when we work for them, we work for ourselves ; we are laying up treasures of which God will give us the benefit in the day of tribulation ; we are insuring a favourable reception for our own souls when our last hour comes. It may be that by the intercessions of the souls that we have helped God will give us such perfect contrition as will suffice for the entire remission of the temporal punishment due to our sins, and that He will enable us to gain a plenary indulgence at the hour of death.

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that He considers as done for Himself whatever we do for the least of His brethren, the humblest of men redeemed by His Blood. “ *Amen dico vobis, quamdiu fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis mini-*

mis, mihi fecistis " (St. Matt. xxv. 40). It will then be as pleasing to Him if we deliver a soul from purgatory as if we delivered Himself, and opened the gates of heaven to Him. What will He not do for those who procure Him this joy, and whom He will in consequence consider as His deliverers? Surely no man on earth, Christian or pagan, could be found so barbarous and ungrateful as to leave languishing in the midst of flames one who had delivered him from the same torments, especially if it were as easy for him to help his preserver as it is for Jesus to release a soul from purgatory. "*Nemo bonus, nisi unus Deus*"—None is good but one, that is God (St. Mark x. 18). No one is so good as God, whose mercy is infinite; our Divine Saviour, therefore, will do much more for us than we have done for the faithful departed; He will offer for us to His Father all the labours of His life, all the sufferings of His Passion. Here is a treasure to pay our debts, to satisfy the Divine justice to the full. He gives us the most formal assurance in Holy Scripture: "Give, and it shall be given to you: good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over"—*Mensuram bonam, confertam, coagitatam, et supereffluentem* (St. Luke vi. 38). Our Lord, who is goodness and mercy and charity itself, will open for us His treasures, and will so make us partakers of His infinite merits that the debt we owe to His Father will be paid to the last farthing. Nothing will hinder our entrance into heaven, when we shall receive from Our Lord the crown promised to charity.

We read in the *Life of St. Gertrude*, that from her earliest years she had learned to offer all her

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prayers and good works for the benefit of the souls in purgatory. This practice was so pleasing to God that Our Lord often condescended to point out to her the souls that were most in need of help, and these souls, delivered by her pious charity, afterwards showed themselves to her in the midst of glory, and thanked her for her goodness, promising not to forget her in heaven. Gertrude had passed her life in this pious practice, and calmly awaited the approach of death, when the devil, who knows how to make use of every opportunity to tempt the souls of men, tried to persuade her that she had lost all the merit of her good works, and would have to expiate her faults by a long term of purgatory. The suggestion threw her into such a state of distress that Our Lord took pity on her, and appeared before her. "Why," He said, "are you so sad and discouraged, you who were but lately so perfectly happy?" "Oh, Lord," she replied, "in what a deplorable position am I! Death approaches, and I am deprived of the merit of my good works which I have applied to the souls in purgatory; how can I ever pay the debt I myself owe to Thy justice?" Our Lord lovingly answered her: "Fear not, my child, for on the contrary, by your charity to the dead, you have increased the sum of your merits, and not only do you possess enough to expiate your slight faults, but you have earned a high degree of glory. It is thus that my mercy will reward your devotion to the holy souls, and you will soon be with me in paradise, to be rewarded a hundredfold for all you have done for them."

These words of our Divine Lord are most consoling, and should stimulate our devotion to

the holy souls in purgatory. Moreover, heaven is the home of gratitude, and the souls released through our prayers remain attached to us by bonds of eternal thankfulness, and as they have in their hands, so to speak, all the treasures of God, will it not be their most earnest desire to repay their benefactors? Most certainly those souls, whose happiness has been hastened by our prayers, will never forget us; they will interest themselves in our welfare, and their powerful intercession will insure our eternal salvation.

Let us imagine one of those suffering souls hearing the voice of the Angel: "Come, holy soul, your exile is over, and you may now enter into heaven; you had still a month, or a year, to suffer, but the Holy Sacrifice offered for you, the prayers and alms of your wife and children, have paid your debt." What will be the first exclamation of that soul at the joyful news, if not a cry of gratitude? "Blessed by God be ye who have obtained mercy for His servant!"—"*Benedicti vos a Domino, qui fecistis misericordiam servo suo!*" How fondly it will cherish the memory of those pious helpers and how earnestly it will pray for them at the feet of the Almighty!

Theology teaches us that the Saints in heaven know all that can interest them on earth. Is it not, then, a duty of justice and gratitude for those who have escaped from purgatory to do their best for those whose prayers have helped them to reach the realm of perfect charity? Yes, if we take care to do something every day for the souls in purgatory, we may hope to have in heaven protectors who will attend to all our wants, and watch over us like guardian angels.

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From their happy home they look down upon the dangers and temptations that beset us, and pray God to deliver us from them ; they join their supplications to ours, and present our prayers to the Most High. What a help in our present necessities, what comfort in our sufferings, what support in our last agony ! What powerful advocates we shall find in these souls at the Day of Judgment !

It is related of a pious woman who had been particularly devoted to the souls in purgatory, that at the hour of death she was furiously assailed by the devil, who was enraged that she was about to escape from him ; it seemed to her that all the legions of hell surrounded her, and while she struggled to set herself free, a number of persons unknown to her, but resplendent with beauty, entered her room, put the devils to flight, and addressed her with words of heavenly consolation : “ We are citizens of heaven, whom your prayers have helped thither, and we have come to deliver you from your sufferings, and lead you into the holy city.” At these words the good woman smiled sweetly, closed her eyes, and peacefully fell asleep in the Lord ; her soul, white and pure as a dove, rose to the presence of her Judge, and in all the souls that she had helped to deliver from purgatory she found so many protectors and advocates, and immediately afterwards entered heaven amid a chorus of gratitude and congratulation (Binet, *De Statu Animæ*, c. 1).

It is written that God will show mercy to us in the same measure as we have done to others. “ *Beati misericordes, quoniam ipsi misericordiam consequentur* ” (St. Matt. v. 7). “ *Eâdem quippe mensurâ qua mensi fueritis, remetietur vobis* ” (St.

Luke vi. 38). What a miserable reflection for those who have lived without thinking of their suffering brethren, and have never offered a prayer on their behalf ! God will allow them to be forgotten, as they have forgotten others. But the memory of those who, during their lives, have remembered the dead and prayed for them, will live in the hearts of the faithful ; their names will be mentioned at the altar, and they will have their share in the sacrifices and prayers of the Church militant. God will reward their charity by shortening their time in purgatory, and those holy souls they have delivered will help them in heaven and on earth, making intercession themselves, and putting it into the hearts of the faithful to pray for them till they receive their eternal reward.

A nun who had been specially devoted to the holy souls appeared after her death to St. Gertrude, wearing a diadem of precious stones, but carrying a heavy burden, which prevented her from following other souls which would have led her into the presence of God. The diadem represented the souls she had delivered by her prayers, and the burden was the result of her own little sins and imperfections. " See," said Our Lord to St. Gertrude, " how these holy souls show their gratitude to their benefactress by their prayers that she may escape from the punishment due to her sins, and yet it is necessary that she should be purified from all stain." The Saint then saw the good nun consoled by the holy souls that surrounded her, and by the prayers of the faithful, which were applied to her by God in return for the fervour she had shown in praying for the dead during her lifetime (*Life of St. Gertrude*, book v., chap. xxv.).

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Even before they enter heaven the holy souls pray for those who obtain for them a mitigation of their punishment. "When I wish to be sure of obtaining a favour," said St. Catherine of Bologna, "I have recourse to the suffering souls, and ask them to present my petition to our common Father, and I generally feel that I owe my success to their intercession."

Father Louis Monaci, of the Regular Clerks Minor, was accustomed when travelling to pray for the souls in purgatory, and to recommend himself to their prayers. One day, when he was travelling through a tract of country infested with brigands, the souls for whom he was then saying the Rosary suddenly appeared, and delivered him from the miscreants who would otherwise have assassinated him, but took flight at the sight of his companions (Carfora, *In fortunâ hominis*, book i., c. x.).

How often may we have been similarly protected by these holy souls, even without knowing it! Sometimes it is a sudden inspiration which induces us to change our plans, to give up some undertaking in which our lives would have been in danger; sometimes it is some unforeseen event which causes us to postpone a journey, or keeps us from a place in which we might perhaps have been the victims of a fatal accident.

It is a well-received opinion among theologians that the souls in purgatory intercede for those who help them. They cannot obtain anything for themselves, and when they ask for relief from their sufferings, their prayers are vain; but it is otherwise with the prayers they make for us. These prayers are in the order of Providence; they have all that is necessary to touch the heart of the Most High, and they have not

the defects which so often make our own prayers ineffectual. These souls are pure and holy, beloved by God, and always in perfect union with him ; they pray without distraction, with fervour and perseverance, and we may hope everything from their intercession.

We have, then, everything to gain by giving our own prayers in exchange for those of the souls in purgatory, and the best way of obtaining from God the favours we desire is to interest the holy souls in our cause, offering for them our prayers and the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and all the indulgences that we can apply to them.

Many stories are told of remarkable favours, and even miracles, obtained by their intercession, of which we may quote a few from the *Echo du Purgatoire* :—

The parish priest of Cirfontaines en Azois wrote in 1869 : “ A young man in my parish was dangerously ill of typhoid fever of a very severe type. His parents, in great distress, came to ask me to recommend him to the prayers of the Association established in favour of the souls in purgatory, and to begin a novena for his recovery. It was Saturday, and that day and the next the disease made such progress that the young man seemed to be at the point of death. All that science could do had been done, and the physician declared there was no hope.

“ But I did not despair. I felt sure that the holy souls, with the assistance of St. Joseph, would in such circumstances give my parish some visible proof of their protection. On Sunday, after praying for the sick man, I promised, if he were cured, to announce the

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fact to all the members of our Society, in order that they might give thanks to the holy souls and to our beloved patron. Our prayers were heard, and on the Monday, the day consecrated to the holy souls, the fever suddenly left the young man. He was out of danger. I leave you to imagine the joy of his parents and friends."

A promoter of the devotion to the souls in purgatory established at Leuze in Belgium wrote in 1877: "A friend of mine had been suffering for a year from heart disease. She had consulted all the best physicians in Brussels, but none of them had been able to do her any good. Knowing that compassion for the souls in purgatory will insure their prayers for those in exile on earth, she resolved to ask their help. She prayed, and promised to have a certain number of Masses said if she was cured by All Souls' Day. On that very day she was cured, and never after had any return of her illness."

The word of Our Lord, "Give, and it shall be given unto you," is never more fully verified than when we give to the souls in purgatory the alms of our prayers, and penances, and good works.

The same year a pious lady sent the following letter to the Editor of the *Écho du Purgatoire* ;

"I desire to fulfil a promise which I made some days ago to the holy souls in purgatory, by whose powerful intercession I have been cured of a long and painful illness. After I had been in bed for two months, suffering excruciating agony, an operation was considered necessary. I submitted willingly, because I hoped for a cure ; but two days after my pains returned, more intense than before. I was in

despair, for I had already made novenas to the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph without obtaining any relief, and as a last resource I turned to the holy souls in purgatory, among whom were my mother-in-law and my daughter, who died in November and September last. This was on a Saturday, and on Sunday I had a terrible paroxysm, which lasted the whole day, but it was the last. On Monday I began to mend, and a week later I was walking about. Since that time I have been perfectly well. I had told the holy souls that if I were cured within a week of this illness, which had lasted for five months, I should know I owed it to their help, and now I desire to express my gratitude."

The Superior of a well-known religious community in France had promised a certain number of Masses for the holy souls if they brought him within a fixed time a number of novices that he needed, and could not hope to obtain without some supernatural aid. On the day fixed he obtained the number he asked for, and more.

We find in a later issue of the *Écho du Purgatoire* the following communications :

"Last winter I was engaged in a large business, and by imprudent speculations ran a risk of losing a large sum of money. I asked for the assistance of the souls in purgatory who had none to pray for them, and through their intercession I escaped without loss."

"A great favour has just been granted to a poor mother in great distress on account of her son, who had failed in his school examinations so completely that she did not know what to do with him, but prayers to the holy souls have brought about a happy result."

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A young man writes : " I had to go up for the examination for my bachelor's degree. Knowing the power of the holy souls to obtain temporal favours from God, I placed myself under their protection, and had a novena of Masses said for them during the nine days before the examination. I am happy to be able to tell you that the result was most favourable, for I passed my examination with honourable mention."

A lady writes, telling of an extraordinary cure that had been vouchsafed to her : " For three years I had suffered from a cancerous tumour, and as a last hope I had a novena of Masses said for the holy souls, promising that, if I were cured, I would publish the fact in the *Écho du Purgatoire*. A few weeks later the tumour had entirely disappeared.

The last two cases we shall mention are very remarkable, but their authenticity is vouched for by Father Rossignoli in his interesting work on the wonders of Divine grace in the souls in purgatory.

In 1649 there lived at Cologne a well-known printer named Wilhelm Freyssen, who, after having received great favours from Almighty God, wrote as follows to Father James Munford, S.J. :

" I write to you, my dear Father, to tell you of the miraculous cure of my wife and son. During the recent holidays I read the book you gave me to print *On the Practice of Charity towards the Souls in Purgatory*. While so engaged, I was informed that my son, aged four years, had been attacked by a strange unknown disease, and was growing rapidly worse, and that his life was in danger. It immediately

occurred to me that I might save him by making a vow in favour of the souls in purgatory. I went at once to the church, and prayed God to cure my child, promising to distribute a hundred copies of your book to priests and religious, in order that they might be stimulated to greater zeal in the cause of the holy souls.

“ I was very hopeful, and when I came back I found the child much better, and asking for food, though for several days past he had been unable to swallow even a drop of liquid. Next day his cure was complete. He got up, went out for a walk, and ate as if he had never been ill. I was full of gratitude, and hastened to fulfil my promise. I took the hundred volumes to the College of the Society, and begged the Fathers to distribute them among the religious Orders and the clergy of their acquaintance, that the suffering souls who had helped me in my need should in their turn be solaced by additional prayers.

“ Three weeks later a new misfortune befell me. My wife, while entering the house, was suddenly seized with a shivering in all her limbs, and fell down unconscious. She soon lost her appetite, and even the power of speech. All known remedies were applied, but without avail. She became rapidly worse, and a few days later seemed at the point of death. Her confessor, seeing that all hope was gone, exhorted me to submit to the will of God ; but after my previous experience I did not despair. I went back to the church, and, prostrate before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament, I renewed my supplications with all the fervour that my affection inspired : ‘ O God, whose mercy is infinite, I pray Thee not to permit that I should save my

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son only at the cost of my wife's life!' I promised to give away two hundred copies of your book in order to induce a large number of persons to pray for the souls in purgatory, and I implored those souls that had already been released to intercede for me.

"Imagine my joy when I found on my return that there was a distinct improvement in my dear wife's condition. The delirium was gone, she had recovered her speech, and her pulse beat normally. She began to eat with a good appetite, and a few days afterwards she was able to go with me to the church to thank God for her miraculous recovery. You may be sure I lost no time in distributing the promised books among the Jesuits, Dominicans, and other religious, begging them to pray for the souls in purgatory. I sign this statement before God, and you may believe every word of it. I ask you to help me to thank God for this double cure" (J. Hautin, S. J., *Puteus Defunct.*, book i., c. v.).

Christopher Sandoval, Archbishop of Seville, when a child, was in the habit of giving part of his pocket-money to the poor for the benefit of the souls in purgatory, and his charity increased with his years. One day, when he was studying at the University of Louvain, he happened to be in want of money, on account of the non-arrival of remittances from Spain, and was obliged to refuse a poor man who had asked for alms in the name of the holy souls. He was so much distressed that he immediately went into a church to pray for the souls in purgatory, as he had not been able to give alms for their intention. He had scarcely finished his prayer when he saw a handsome young man approaching,

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who saluted him cordially, gave him news of his family, and offered him a sum of money to dispose of as he thought fit. He then pleaded pressing business, and retired. Christopher never saw the stranger again, and in spite of all his inquiries could never obtain any information about him. He was convinced that God had wrought a miracle in favour of the holy souls, and had sent to his help one of those whom he had succoured by his alms ; and Pope Clement VIII., to whom he subsequently told the story, confirmed him in this belief, and commanded him to make the facts known, in order to encourage the faithful to pray for the departed (Martin de Roa, *De Statu Animarum*, c. xxx.).

Many similar instances might be quoted of miraculous cures, protection in danger, unexpected help, etc., attributed with good reason to the souls in purgatory, and recorded in various publications. They show that blessings and consolations of all kinds are vouchsafed in return for generous devotion to the departed. Happy and blessed are they who pray for the dead. On earth they will have joy, confidence, and peace, and in heaven rest and happiness, and an eternal reward.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

BELIEF IN APPARITIONS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF SOULS IN PURGATORY IN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

IMMEDIATELY after the particular judgment, all souls enter heaven, hell, or purgatory, according to their deserts. But we have shown in the fourth chapter of this work that, as St. Thomas Aquinas asserts (*Supplement*, q. 69), they are occasionally allowed by God—temporarily, at least—to revisit the earth, in order to give warnings and advice to the living or to ask for the help of their prayers.

All nations, the most savage as well as the most civilized, believe that departed souls are permitted to reappear on the earth in bodily form, to make themselves seen and heard, and ask for what they desire. There is nothing in this that is contrary to reason, nothing beyond God's omnipotence. "It is beyond doubt," says Bergier (*Dictionary of Theology*, article 'Apparitions'), "that when a human soul is separated from the body, God can cause it to reappear, giving back to it the same body that it has quitted, or clothing it with another, and can enable it to perform the same functions as before death; and this method of instructing and warning men is one of the most striking that God can employ."

Holy Scripture leaves no doubt on this point. We read of Moses and Elias appearing and talking with Jesus Christ at the time of His Transfiguration (St. Matt. xvii.); and of the prophet Jeremias, accompanied by the virtuous High-Priest Onias, giving to Judas Machabeus a sword of gold, saying, "Take this holy sword a gift from God, wherewith thou shalt overthrow the adversaries of My people Israel" (2 Mach. xv.).

We read again in the First Book of Kings that the prophet Samuel appeared to the witch of Endor, and foretold all the misfortunes that should come upon Saul. St. Augustine says it is not unreasonable to believe that God really permitted the prophet to appear in order to convince the King of his wickedness, and put into him a wholesome fear of God's wrath (4 *Quæst. ad Simplic.*). The same holy Doctor speaks, in his letter to the Bishop Evodius, of a young man who, after his death, appeared to several persons, "by which," he adds, "God permitted them to be confirmed in their belief in His holiness." He relates also that during his residence at Milan a man arose from the grave in order to give his son proof of the payment of a sum of money which was unjustly claimed from him. Eusebius, St. Paulinus, Origen, Theodoret, St. Gregory the Great, and many others, relate similar occurrences.

St. Thomas Aquinas, whose lofty intellect and deep learning place him above the reproach of superstition, was several times favoured with these extraordinary apparitions, which enabled him to hold intercourse with the world of spirits.

His biographers tell us that when he was studying theology at the University of Paris his

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sister, who had just died at the Convent of Capua, appeared to him and asked for his prayers. Some time afterwards, when the holy Doctor was in Rome, that dear soul appeared to him again, radiant with glory. She came to thank him for his prayers, which had procured her entrance into heaven. The Saint, who had long been familiarized with supernatural things, was not afraid to enter into conversation with her, and to ask her what had become of two of his brothers, who had died some time before. "Arnold is in heaven," answered his sister, "and enjoys a high degree of glory, for having defended the Church and the Sovereign Pontiff against the impious attacks of the Emperor Frederic ; but Ludolph is still suffering in purgatory, because no one prays for him. As for yourself, dear brother, a magnificent place awaits you in paradise, in reward for all that you have done for the Church."

Another day the same Saint, while praying in the Church of St. Dominic at Naples, saw before him Brother Romanus, who had succeeded him in Paris in the office of Reader in Theology. At first St. Thomas thought that Romanus must have just arrived from Paris, as he had not heard of his death, and he rose from his knees to ask particulars of his health and the reasons of his visit to Naples. "I am no longer on earth," said the good Brother, with a smile. "Through the mercy of God, I passed only fifteen days in purgatory, and I am come by His order to encourage you in your work." "Am I in a state of grace?" immediately asked St. Thomas. "Yes, my Brother, and I am commanded to tell you that your work is in the highest degree pleasing to God." Then the

theologian, being assured as to his own state, desired to take advantage of the opportunity to fathom some of the mysteries of religion, and especially the mystery of the Beatific Vision ; but he was answered in the words of the Psalmist : "*Sicut audivimus, sic vidimus in civitate Domini virtutum, in civitate Dei nostri*" —As we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God (Ps. xlvii. 9)—and the apparition disappeared (V. Bolland).

We cannot deny or call in question the authority of St. Thomas ; moreover, we have seen above what is the teaching of the great Doctor on this question.

The learned Cardinal Bellarmine, in a remarkable dissertation entitled, *Num ex receptaculis suis animæ defunctorum egredi valeant?* establishes the doctrine of apparitions as certain and indubitable, although in particular cases persons may be deceived and take for realities what are simply the effects of imagination or fraud. Origen treats of the same question, and teaches that souls, whose nature it is to be united to a material substance, are able in the other world to take a body endowed with subtility, but outwardly resembling the natural body which they have left on earth. This new body in which the soul is enveloped as in a garment renders it visible to mortal eyes.

St. Augustine expresses the same opinion with equal confidence in several of his works. A certain Bishop consulted him, asking what was to be thought of the apparitions of persons long dead who were seen to come and go in their houses as before, and of noises which were heard at night in various places. The Saint

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replied to his friend's questions with as much learning as wisdom in a long letter which sums up his teaching on this point. "We must," he said, "neither believe too easily in apparitions of dead persons, nor reject them all as impossible; for it is certain that God has permitted them on many occasions, as you may see in my work on Genesis, in which you will find many such instances related, some of which I have witnessed myself, and others I have learned from persons of unimpeachable veracity."

In another book he treats of the subject at greater length. "I am far from believing," he says, "that it is an ordinary or natural thing for the dead to reappear among the living and show an interest in their affairs; for, if this power were given them, there is not a single night when I should not expect to see my pious mother appear, who in her lifetime was never separated from me, and followed me by land and sea into the most distant countries. I do not believe that such things happen in the ordinary course of events, but I am convinced that the omnipotence of God may at times permit them, for reasons full of wisdom and deserving of our respect. *Per divinam potentiam vivorum rebus intersunt.*

"Men, living or dead, appear to others, either in sleep or in their waking hours, but not absolutely in their own substance. We should rather say it is representations of them that appear. We believe that this is effected by the ministry of Angels, and that God permits it according to His own inscrutable designs for the purpose of instructing men, or of consoling or terrifying them, according as justice or mercy

is reserved for each by Him whom Holy Scripture truly calls Mercy and Justice.

“The souls of the departed are in a place where they neither see nor hear what is happening on earth, and yet they are interested in the living, even if they do not know what they are doing. In truth, they do not know of themselves what is passing here, but they may know it from souls to whom they are reunited by death—at least so far as God permits it, and it is useful for them. They may learn it also from the angels who protect them, and who at death follow them into the other life. God also may enable them to know by inspiration all that it is necessary or useful for them to know.

“Besides, the dead may be sent to the living, not by their own power, but by the power of God.

“Whether these apparitions indicate their actual presence, or whether the angels act through them, I cannot say with certainty, for Almighty God, who is present everywhere, may employ the ministry of angels to give to men the consolations with which He thinks fit to relieve the miseries of their earthly pilgrimage” (*De Curâ pro Mortuis*).

Cardinal Bona, in his learned treatise on the discernment of spirits, confirms and develops the teaching of St. Augustine, and adds: “It is certain that there are real apparitions, by which men are instructed and led to virtue, and there are also false ones, by which God permits some persons to be deceived. It sometimes happens that the devil appears under the form of a person who has died in sin, and asks for prayers, alms, and pilgrimages on behalf of that person, in order that those who are in sin may

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continue therein, being deceived by the vain hope raised by these illusions. But it is easy," adds the learned Cardinal, "to protect oneself against deceit, for the prayers which these false apparitions ask for are generally to be combined with some foolish or superstitious practices, and the request is accompanied by threats and prognostications of evil, by which it is easy to recognize the spirit from which they proceed."

Theologians, following Cardinal Bona, give rules by which we may distinguish real apparitions from illusions of the devil. If the deceased person appears black, hideous, or mutilated, or in the form of an animal (except that of a lamb or a dove, neither of which is ever assumed by the devil); if he speaks in a hoarse, indistinct, faltering voice; if he acts in a disorderly manner; if he enjoins something which is contrary to faith; if he blasphemes or shows horror of holy things or blessed objects; then, they tell us, we may be sure that it is the work of the devil. Good apparitions first produce a certain agitation, which soon gives place to a holy joy, a Divine unction which fills the soul, increases its humility and charity, and excites in it a desire for perfection. The opposite effect is produced by apparitions which are the work of the devil. They begin with a feeling of pleasure and self-satisfaction, which is followed by vain-glory, presumption, and pride.

It is with reason, then, that the Holy Scriptures and the laws of the Church strictly forbid the evocation of the dead—first, because it is not permitted to disturb their repose without reason; and, secondly, because in thus calling up an apparition we expose ourselves to the danger of falling into the snares of the devil.

Theologians, again, ask in what manner the supernatural apparitions and manifestations are produced. Do the deceased appear in their own flesh, thus temporarily restored to life, which would be a real resurrection, or do they appear in borrowed bodies? And can they form their bodies by their own power, or are they obliged to have recourse to the ministry of angels? In short, may we not say that these phenomena have no objective reality, and that they result from a purely subjective impression, produced upon the senses of a person who *thinks* he sees, hears, and touches what has no real existence?

None of these hypotheses are condemned by the Church, and all are more or less admitted by theologians. The last opinion, however, which reduces the apparitions to simple, subjective phenomena, which, in fact, makes of them mere hallucinations, seems wanting in probability. It is true that the dead may, and sometimes do, manifest themselves by dreams, inspirations, and presentiments; but we cannot deny the reality of visible apparitions in many cases, especially when they are produced at the same time and in the same manner before a large number of persons or even before the whole population of a place, as happened in the case of the excommunicated persons buried in the church at Hildesheim, who, at the word of the Bishop commanding them to leave the holy place, raised the slabs which covered their graves, arose, and left the church. A similar incident occurred at Arona, after the famous plague which carried off so many victims in the diocese of Milan. One day, at the end of Vespers, a crowd of dead persons were seen to come forth from the cemetery, and proceed

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towards the church. The Governor of the city, the Archpriest, and other persons were witnesses of the apparition, and immediately the church bells were rung, and the faithful were summoned for the next day to a solemn service on behalf of the victims of the plague. An hallucination does not act in this manner, but it depends, so physicians tell us, on the imagination, the temperament, and bodily condition of the persons affected.

St. Augustine is of opinion that apparitions frequently take place without the participation of the deceased, and even without their knowledge, by the ministry of good or bad angels, which borrow from Nature the material elements with which they are clothed. St. Thomas is less exclusive, and while he admits that apparitions are sometimes the work of good or bad angels, who take the human form of deceased persons even without their knowledge, he maintains that the dead may, with the permission of God, appear themselves to the living under bodily forms (*Summa Theologica*, part i., q. 89, a. 2).

Whatever may be thought of the different theories as to the manner in which these bodily forms are produced, and the material of which they are composed, we may take it as an incontestable truth that the dead do appear and show themselves visibly to the living. This truth is asserted, as we have seen, by Holy Scripture, by tradition, and by the doctors of the Church; and we may add the decisions of various particular Councils, the legends of the Breviary, the testimony of painting and sculpture, and a great number of apparitions reported in history.

Among these extraordinary manifestations quoted by different persons of unimpeachable veracity, we have chosen those which appear most interesting and most authentic, without attributing to them any other authority but that of the witnesses who relate them, and that which may be presented by the particular revelations on which the Church has not yet pronounced.

I.

It is reported in the Life of Sister Catherine of St. Augustine that in the town in which she lived there was a woman named Mary, who from her youth had led a scandalous life. She grew worse as she grew older, and the townspeople at length expelled her as being a disgrace to the neighbourhood ; she therefore took refuge in a cave outside the town, where she died some time afterwards, abandoned by all, without sacraments, and without consolation of any kind.

It was Sister Catherine's pious custom to pray for the souls of all the persons of her acquaintance who had passed to the other life, but she never thought of this old sinner, whom she believed to be hopelessly lost. About four years after the woman's death, a soul from purgatory appeared to the holy nun while she was at prayer, and said : " Sister Catherine, you pray for all those who die, but you never think of my poor soul." " Who are you ?" asked the Sister ; and the apparition answered : " I am that poor Mary who died in the cavern." " What ! you are saved ?" said Sister Catherine in astonishment. " Yes," replied the poor soul ; " I am saved by the mercy of the Blessed

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Virgin. In my last moments, deserted by all the world, and oppressed with the weight of my sins, I cried out to the Mother of God from the bottom of my heart : ' O Mary, refuge of sinners, help of the helpless, have pity on me, forsaken by all the world ; have pity on me, for you are my only hope ! ' I did not pray in vain, for it was at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin that I escaped hell by an act of true contrition. This Queen of Mercy has obtained for me the grace that my time in purgatory shall be shortened in consideration of the intense sufferings I have undergone. I need only a few Masses for my deliverance, and I promise you that, if you will have them said, I will never cease to pray to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother for you."

Sister Catherine had the required Masses said, and a few days afterwards the same soul appeared to her again to show her gratitude. " I thank you, Sister Catherine," she said, " paradise is at last open to me ; I go to praise God for His mercy, and to pray for you " (St. Alphonsus Liguori).

II.

It is a pious practice among the people of Rome to visit the churches of the city, carrying candles in their hands, on the vigil of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and to pass some time there in prayer. One year a devout woman was in the crowd of worshippers in the Church of Ara Coeli, and she saw at a short distance from her a woman whom she had known intimately, and who had been dead for about a year. She could not reach her for the

crowd, but waited for her as she came out, and as soon as she could come near her, asked : " Are you not my godmother, Marozia, who held me at the font when I was baptized ?" " Yes," said the apparition ; " I am, indeed." " How, then, do I meet you here, when I know you died last year ? What has happened to you on the other side of the grave ?" The dead woman answered : " Till this day I have been detained in unquenchable fire because of the sins of impurity I committed in my youth. I confessed them all, it is true ; but, though the guilt was remitted, I did not escape the temporal punishment, which in consequence I have been undergoing in purgatory. To-day the Queen of Heaven, moved with compassion for the suffering souls, has obtained for me and many others deliverance from our prison and admission to paradise in honour of the Feast of her Assumption. You see me only, but we are here in immense numbers, going from one to another of the churches dedicated to Mary to thank her for her compassion."

The pious woman stood amazed, not knowing what to think, but Marozia added : " In order that you may not doubt the truth of my words, I tell you that you will die next year on the Feast of the Assumption. If you are alive after that date, you may believe that all this is an illusion." And then she disappeared. The lady remained in the church, no longer able to doubt that God had condescended to warn her in this manner of her approaching death. From that hour she renounced all worldly pleasures, and lived a life of great austerity and retirement, and constantly receiving the sacraments of penance and the Holy Eucharist. The fol-

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lowing year, two days before the Assumption, she fell ill. The next day her case was pronounced hopeless, and on the feast-day she piously expired (St. Peter Damian, *Opusc.* 24, part ii., c. iii.).

III.

Father Lacordaire, in one of his conferences delivered to the students of Sorèze, told them the following story :

A Polish Prince, who was an avowed unbeliever and materialist, had written a book against the immortality of the soul, and was on the point of having it published. One day he was walking in the park, when a poor woman threw herself at his feet in great distress, saying : " Prince, my husband is just dead, and his soul is perhaps now in purgatory. I should like to have a Mass said for him, but I have not a penny. I pray you to help me, for the sake of my poor husband." The Prince was touched by her suffering, though he thought the offering of Mass a mere superstition, and he took out a piece of gold and gave it to the poor woman, who immediately hurried to the church and asked the priest to say a Mass for her husband.

Three days afterwards the Prince was in his study, revising his manuscript, when, hearing a slight noise, he looked up, and saw before him a man dressed in the costume of the peasants of the country, and was on the point of rising to eject him, when the unknown suddenly disappeared. The Prince called his servants, and rebuked them for allowing a stranger to enter his room without permission. They denied all knowledge of the occurrence, and declared that

no one had entered the house. The same thing happened the next evening, and no explanation could be found of the strange phenomenon. On the third evening, the visitor reappeared, but before the Prince had time to say a word the unknown addressed him. "Prince, I am come to thank you. I am the husband of that woman who begged an alms from you that she might have Mass said for my soul. Your charity has been pleasing to God, who has sent me to assure you that there is another life, and that the soul is immortal. It is for you to take advantage of the warning that has been given you."

With these words the peasant disappeared, leaving the Prince to his emotions. The latter at once called his servants, and with tears told them what had happened. He threw into the fire the impious work he had written, and thanked God sincerely for his conversion.

IV.

In the Duchy of Luxembourg there died a lady well known for her piety. A few days after her burial she appeared to a young girl who had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin. She appeared especially in the church, because, as she said, having nothing else to suffer but the privation of the sight of God, she desired to console herself for this loss by contemplating Him under the Eucharistic species. She accompanied the young girl in all her practices of piety, especially when she assisted at the Holy Sacrifice, and at the moment of the elevation her face was illuminated with an extraordinary brightness. When her friend went up to receive Holy Communion the apparition went with her,

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and remained with her during her thanksgiving, holding a rosary in her hand as a sign of the devotion she had always professed to the Queen of Heaven.

One day she asked the young girl to have three Masses said, which she had promised by a vow, but had not had said before her death. When this had been done, she professed the greatest gratitude to her benefactress, saying that the time of her suffering was drawing to a close ; and on the third day of the Octave of the Immaculate Conception she came to thank her friend once more, and then, accompanied by her guardian angel, rose triumphantly to heaven (Eus. Nieremberg, *De Pulchrit. Dei*, book ii., c. xi.).

V.

The Abbé Pestel vouches for the truth of the following account of an incident which occurred in the year 1827 : A poor servant-girl, virtuously brought up in the country, was in the habit of putting by every month out of her small wages a sum of money to have a Mass said for the souls in purgatory. She came to Paris in the service of a very respectable family, but lost her situation on account of a long illness. On her recovery, as she was on her way to a registry office, she passed a church, and went in to say a prayer. The sight of a priest at the altar reminded her that it was more than a month since she had had Mass said for the suffering souls, and she immediately went to the sacristy, where she offered her last remaining coin for the Mass, feeling sure that God would provide for her wants. After assisting at the Mass with great fervour, she went on her

way, and was accosted by a pale young man of distinguished appearance, who asked what was her trouble, and on receiving her answer, directed her to a certain house in a neighbouring street.

The poor girl knocked at the door of the house indicated, and was received by an elderly lady in deep mourning, who, on hearing the purpose of her visit, replied : " It is true that I have just discharged my servant on account of her insolence, but I could not have foreseen it, and I have not told a single person. How could you possibly have known ? " " Madam, a gentleman met me five minutes ago, and told me you were in want of a servant, and there " —pointing to a picture on the wall—" is his portrait." " That," said the lady, " is the portrait of my son, who died a few months ago. Tell me, for mercy's sake, how you met him." The poor girl told the whole story of her trouble, her devotion to the souls in purgatory, and the rest ; and the lady affectionately embraced her, and said : " You have no doubt procured the release of my son. He was a good Christian, but perhaps he was suffering in purgatory. I will take you, not as my servant, but as my adopted daughter."

VI.

In the year 1641 a Franciscan Brother, named Francis John de Via, died in a convent in the Canary Islands. One day he appeared, surrounded by rays of light, to Brother Ascensio, who had nursed him during his last illness, and had never ceased to pray for the repose of his soul. The infirmarian did not recognize him, and asked his name. " I am," he said, " Brother

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John de Via. I am very grateful for your prayers, and I have come to tell you that, by the mercy of God, I am saved, and destined for heaven, as you may see from these rays of light which surround me. But I am not yet considered worthy to behold the face of God, for I neglected to recite certain offices for the dead, which I was bound by my Rule to say. I beg you, for the sake of your affection for me, and still more for the love you have for Our Lord, to make up for my omission." Brother Ascensio ran to tell the Father-Guardian, who at once called all the religious of the convent into the choir, and the office was recited. Immediately afterwards Brother John appeared again to the infirmarian, thanking him joyfully for his charity, and telling him that the prayers of the community had procured his entrance into heaven (*De Orig. Seraph. Relig.*, part iv.).

VII.

The venerable Father Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., founder of the Abbey of St. Vincent at Latrobe in America, tells the following story of an apparition in his convent :

"On September 18 a novice in our Abbey saw the apparition of a Benedictine monk in complete choir habit. The same vision appeared every day from September 18 to November 19, either from 11 a.m. till noon, or from midnight till 2 a.m. On November 19 the novice addressed the monk for the first time, and asked what he wanted. The monk answered that he had been seventy-seven years in purgatory for having negligently omitted to say seven Masses of obligation ; that he had already appeared at

different times to three other Benedictines, but had not been heard ; and that he would be obliged to appear again in eleven years if the Masses were not said. The novice, moreover, was requested to say the Psalm *Miserere* three times a day for thirty-three days with his feet bare and his arms raised to heaven.

“ All these conditions were fulfilled, beginning from November 21, and on December 25, after the last Mass had been celebrated, the vision disappeared. During that period the spirit of the monk appeared several times, exhorting the novice in the most touching language to pray for the souls in purgatory, declaring that their sufferings were exceedingly great, and that they were deeply grateful to all who helped to release them.”

The above is the statement of the Abbot, made on February 26, 1860, and signed with his hand. It was published in the newspaper *Le Monde* on April 4, 1860.

VIII.

Blessed Henry Suso, the Dominican, when studying at Cologne, had a great friend belonging to the same Order. When they parted, after finishing their studies, they agreed that, whichever of the two should survive the other should say two Masses for his deceased friend every week—the Mass of the Dead every Monday, and that of the Passion every Friday.

The friend died first, but Suso forgot his promise to say the Masses, and contented himself with prayers for his soul. One day, when at prayer, he heard a noise behind him. He took no notice at first, and continued his

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prayers. After a time, however, he heard a voice, which he recognized as that of his deceased friend, reproaching him for his forgetfulness. He excused himself by saying that he had often prayed for him, but his friend replied : " My brother, your prayers are not enough ; I need blood to quench the flames by which I am tormented—the blood of Jesus Christ offered in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." Suso remembered his promise, and every week afterwards offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for his friend's soul. Some time afterwards his friend appeared to him again, and thanked him for his charity, which had released him from purgatory (*Life of Blessed Henry Suso*).

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

DEVOTION TO THE SOULS IN PURGATORY IN THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

I.

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER was congratulated one day on the number of his victories over the devil, and he declared that St. Teresa, in her cell, had done more by her prayers and mortifications than he by all his preaching.

This statement of the glorious Apostle of the Indies leads us to consider the meritorious work of St. Teresa on behalf of the poor souls in purgatory, to whom she always showed a marvellous charity, as the following incidents recorded in her life bear witness :

Don Bernardin of Mendoza, a Spanish gentleman, wishing to give proof of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, offered to give St. Teresa a house which belonged to him near Valladolid if she would found a convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

"To tell the truth," says St. Teresa, "I was not very willing to establish a convent at so great a distance from the city. But the offer was made with so good a will, and to so good an end, that I was unwilling to deprive this young gentleman of the merit which he might derive from his generosity.

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“About two months afterwards he fell so suddenly ill that he was deprived of the use of his speech, and was unable, therefore, to make his confession, although he gave many proofs of contrition for his sins. He died in a short time at a great distance from the place where I then was. Our Lord told me that his salvation had been in great danger, that He had had mercy on him on account of the service rendered to His blessed Mother in giving that house to found a monastery of her Order, but that he would not be delivered from purgatory until the first Mass should be said there.

“The grievous sufferings of this soul were so continually present to me that, though I wished to found a house in Toledo, I would not begin for the present, but hurried on to the utmost of my power the foundation in Valladolid. I could not put my design into execution as soon as I wished, for I was obliged to stop for some days at St. Joseph’s at Avila, which was on my way.

“Our Lord said to me one day, while I was at prayer in that monastery: ‘Make haste, for that soul is suffering exceedingly.’”

St. Teresa immediately began her journey, without any preparation, and arrived at Valladolid on the Feast of St. Lawrence. After such arrangements had been made as were absolutely necessary that they might be able to observe enclosure, the Holy Sacrifice was offered.

“When the priest came forward to give the Communion, with the ciborium in his hand,” writes the Saint, “at the moment I received the Sacred Host, that gentleman appeared to me standing at the side of the priest, with a radiant and joyful countenance. He thanked

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me for having delivered him from purgatory, and then straightway ascended into heaven.

“Great is the mercy of Our Lord, and wonderfully acceptable is any service rendered to His Blessed Mother.”

St. Teresa was favoured with many other visions relating to the souls in purgatory, and gives the following account of some of them :

“I heard of the death of a Carmelite Father, who had formerly been Provincial of this province, and at the time of his death was Provincial of another. I had had correspondence with him, and he had been very kind to me. The news of his death, therefore, caused me great distress. Although he was a man well known for his virtues, I was anxious about the salvation of his soul, for he had been Superior for twenty years, and I am always afraid for those who have been placed in authority over others. I went sorrowfully to the oratory, and implored Our Lord to accept the little good I had ever done for the benefit of this friar, and by virtue of His own infinite merits to deliver his soul from purgatory. While I was offering this prayer with all the fervour of which I was capable, I saw this soul arise from the earth, and ascend to heaven in a transport of joy. Although the Father was advanced in years, he had the appearance of a man of about thirty years old, and his countenance was resplendent with light. This vision, though of very short duration, filled me with joy, and left me without a shadow of doubt as to what I had seen.

“I could not, after that, share the grief of many others who mourned for him as a friend exceedingly dear to them. He had not been dead more than a fortnight, and I did not cease

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to pray and ask others to pray for him ; but, to tell the truth, I could not pray for him with the same fervour as before, for when Our Lord has permitted me to see a soul ascend to heaven, it seems to me that praying for that soul is like offering alms to a rich man. As I was at a great distance from the place where this servant of God had ended his days, it was a considerable time before I could hear all the particulars of his edifying death. Those who were present could not see without admiration the consciousness which he retained till the last moment, the tears he shed, and the sentiments of humility with which he gave up his soul to God.

“ A very holy nun of our Order had died two days before ; the Office of the Dead was being recited for her in choir. A sister was reading one of the lessons, and I was standing prepared to say the Versicle. In the middle of the lesson, I saw the soul of this nun rise from the earth, like that of the priest of whom I have just spoken, and ascend to heaven. This vision was purely intellectual, while in the other I had seen the visible form of the priest ; but the one left on my mind the same impression of reality as the other.

“ In the same monastery another nun had just died—a young woman of about eighteen or twenty years old, a model of fervour, regularity, and virtue. Her life had been one long series of illnesses and sufferings borne with the utmost patience, and I felt sure that, after such a life, she would be exempt from purgatory. I was at office when her body was carried from her cell about four hours after her death, and I saw her soul in the same manner rise from the earth and ascend to heaven.

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“ One day, when I was suffering, as I did from time to time, such great pain of mind and body that I could hardly collect my thoughts, I found myself in the chapel of a college belonging to the Society of Jesus. A Brother of the house had died the night before, and I prayed for him as well as I could. While hearing a Mass said for him by one of the Fathers of the Society, I began my meditation, and saw the brother ascending to heaven, accompanied by Our Blessed Lord Himself, who informed me it was by a special favour that He had come to conduct the Brother to the home of the blessed.

“ God enlightened me similarly in the case of a pious Carmelite Father whom I knew to be at the point of death. I was hearing Mass with great attention, when I saw him expire and ascend to heaven without passing through purgatory, and I was informed afterwards that he had died at the very moment when I had the vision. I was surprised that he should have had no purgatory at all, but I learned that he had been always most faithful in observing his rule, and therefore he had received the special favours granted to his Order by the special Bulls relating to the pains of purgatory. I do not know why this was told me, unless to remind me that it is not the habit that makes the monk, but that in order to enjoy all the graces accorded to the monastic life, it is necessary to fulfil all the duties of that state with the greatest fidelity.

“ I could mention a great number of other visions of this kind with which Our Lord has been pleased to favour me, but it is unnecessary to say more. I will only make this remark—

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that of all these souls, I have seen only three go straight to heaven without passing through purgatory—that of the Carmelite father I have just mentioned, that of St. Peter of Alcantara, and that of Father Peter Ybannes of the Order of St. Dominic. Our Divine Lord has also condescended to show me the places that some of these blessed souls occupy in heaven, and the degrees of glory that they enjoy” (*Life of St. Teresa*).

II.

St. Catherine de Ricci was a contemporary of St. Teresa, and, like her, had a great devotion to the souls in purgatory.

She received the religious veil while still very young in a convent of Dominican nuns at Prato in Tuscany, and in this pious retreat Our Blessed Lord, in order to imprint on her soul dispositions conformable to His own, was pleased to exercise her patience by rigorous trials, and for two years she suffered from a complication of diseases. After the recovery of her health she practised the greatest austerities that were compatible with the obedience she professed. She fasted two or three days a week on bread and water, and sometimes passed the whole day without taking any nourishment; at the same time she chastised her body with disciplines, and wore a heavy iron chain next her skin.

In order to obtain from God the conversion of sinners and the deliverance of the souls in purgatory, Catherine offered herself as a victim, and when the sacrifice was accepted, she suffered inexpressible pains; but the conversion was effected, and the suffering soul was delivered.

What gave Catherine her wonderful power to

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save souls, says her biographer, was not only her participation in the agony of her crucified Spouse, but also her participation in that immense love of souls which induced Him to suffer and die for them ; for she could not save others except by offering herself as a sacrifice for them, by taking upon herself all the punishment due to the guilty, and leaving to them the benefits of her expiation, the merits of her own sufferings.

It is because Catherine shared with Jesus Christ His great love for souls that He gave her the power to draw them to Him by a word, by a look, even by her very presence. It is because He knew her to be, like the true Spouse of a God, immolated for the salvation of mankind, consumed by that thirst for suffering and sacrifice, that He crowned her before the eyes of men with the most noble, the most touching, attribute of His divinity—the exercise of His infinite mercy.

Like another Samuel, she never ceased to mourn over the sins of men, and to implore Our Lord to save them, offering herself to His justice that she might suffer in her own body and soul the punishment due to them. Her offering was so generous, so all-embracing, and God seemed to accept it so fully, that at times it appeared as if she must sink under the weight of her immense responsibility. Her sisters saw her panting with fatigue, bowed and tottering in her gait, as if a burden had been laid upon her greater than she could bear. "I feel," she said to one of them, "as if Jesus had laid the weight of the whole world on my shoulders."

But our Saint did not confine her care to the

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living ; she displayed an extraordinary zeal on behalf of the souls in purgatory. From her childhood, and while she still possessed only the ordinary light of faith on the state of the souls in that place of expiation, she had a tender compassion for those poor creatures, so dear to God, and yet condemned to suffer the severity of His justice. She would have accused herself of cruelty towards them if she had not given them a large share of her prayers, her mortifications, and her daily good works.

But when Jesus Christ associated her with Himself in the agony of His Passion and the exercise of His mercy, He gave her a fuller revelation of the truth concerning the state of those souls, in order that He might proportionately increase the fervour of her charity and devotion on their behalf. Thus, regularly every week, on Thursday and Friday, she accompanied Jesus Christ along the dolorous way of His Passion ; on Sunday evening she went down in spirit to hell to gaze on the torments of the damned, and the sufferings of the just in their place of expiation ; and as the terrible spectacle of hell inspired her with an indefatigable zeal for the conversion of sinners, the sufferings of purgatory excited her pity for the poor souls detained therein, and she spared neither tears nor prayers nor sufferings to obtain their deliverance.

Besides these periodical visits, God caused her to make others at different times, according to the circumstances and needs of particular souls, generally under the guidance of her guardian angel. It is said that when she came in sight of those unhappy souls, her heart was filled with such a loving sympathy for their

sufferings that she would throw herself at the feet of her heavenly guide, and implore him to use all his power to deliver them. If the Blessed Virgin or any of the Saints appeared to her at that moment, as was often the case, she would redouble her tears as she invoked their help. Such fervent intercessions were always crowned with success, and it was one of the joys of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to multiply the apparitions of Saints around her at such times, in order to encourage her zeal and the exercise of her charity on behalf of the suffering souls.

One day, when she had gone down under the guidance of St. Thomas Aquinas, she met a man whom she might reasonably have believed to be in hell, to judge by his public life. She had known him as a man holding high office in the Church, who had lived like a man of the world, proud, ambitious, spending the large revenues of his benefices for his own gratification, without a thought for the wants of the poor; then, all of a sudden, she had heard nothing more of him, but that he was dead. But in the meantime God had granted him one favour—a pilgrimage to Prato.

He had come; he had seen the Saint in an ecstasy; his heart was touched, and shortly after his return home he died truly repentant. He found himself in purgatory, with a long term of expiation before him, and that very day he saw St. Catherine appear. His first impulse was to fall at her feet, and tell her that it was to her he owed his conversion and the happiness of having escaped the pains of hell; then he begged her to complete her work, and save him from the long punishment which awaited him

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in the flames of purgatory. Catherine, touched with pity, promised to help him, and soon obtained his deliverance.

On another occasion she was astonished to see a nun of her own convent whom all her companions believed to be in heaven, because of the great fervour of her life and her scrupulous observance of all the rules of the convent to her last day. But it seemed that she had been negligent in the administration of the temporal interests of the community which had been committed to her charge, and had in consequence been condemned to remain in purgatory for a considerable time. For, adds the pious historian, although these temporal objects have no great value in themselves, yet, inasmuch as they belong to the convent, they are the patrimony of the poor, and, as such, demand the most careful attention. Catherine took pity on her sufferings, and hastened to open heaven to her by the merit of her prayers.

The Divine Redeemer of souls was so touched by the zeal and affection of His Spouse for these poor captives that not only did He readily grant her their liberty, but He took pleasure in consoling her for the sorrowful spectacle of their pains by that of their joyful deliverance and their triumphal entrance into heaven.

One evening, the Vigil of the Purification, while she was engaged in meditation, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, and, opening her royal mantle before her eyes, showed her the innumerable multitude of souls she had delivered from purgatory, among whom she recognized one of her sisters in the world and another of her own convent. The sight of their happiness and their gratitude filled her soul

with the purest joy, and for a moment she believed herself to be in heaven.

But Our Lord was not content with exciting the zeal of Catherine to pray for these souls by the contemplation of their sufferings ; He even permitted them to come and plead their cause before her. Whether God had allowed these poor souls to be witnesses of her frequent visits and the marvellous effects of her powerful intercession, or whether He had directly revealed them, the name of Catherine was blessed among the inhabitants of purgatory, who strove eagerly to attract her attention, as if that were a certain pledge of their speedy deliverance. Thus, when she had escaped from the solicitations of the living, and retired to her solitude, Catherine found herself besieged by an equally importunate crowd of departed souls. Sometimes they appeared to her in her cell, like poor prisoners loaded with chains, or enveloped in flames, calling in plaintive tones for her help ; sometimes they made their groans and lamentations heard in various parts of the monastery.

One night, when she was at prayer, cries were heard from the direction of the garden, as of a person in distress. Several of the sisters, who had opened their windows at the same time as Mother Catherine, saw flames rising from the ground and mounting to the level of their rooms. While they were wondering how to account for the phenomenon, they distinctly heard the voice of a benefactor of the convent, who had died some days before, calling on Catherine to have pity on his soul. When he had made his request, the flames vanished. The Saint at once began to pray to God for him, and her request was soon granted.

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When her prayers and ordinary penances were not sufficient to obtain release for the suffering souls, she adopted heroic measures for the purpose, and offered herself as a victim in their place, asking God to inflict upon her person all the punishments reserved for them by the Divine justice. We will quote only one example, which has been mentioned by all her biographers, and which in the last years of her life was the crown of her long career of devotion. Having laboured for more than twenty years by her tears, her penances, and the fervour of her prayers, to bring back into the way of salvation a Prince who had given himself wholly up to the gratification of vicious propensities, she succeeded only at the hour of his death. Not content with this, she undertook by her own sufferings to save him from the terrible punishment which awaited him in purgatory. By one of those phenomena which can only be explained by the miraculous intervention of Divine Omnipotence, the Saint appeared for forty days to be visibly undergoing a real purgatory, and, as it were, to be plunged into flames which could not be seen by the eye, but the effects of which were made manifest on her whole body. Her flesh was covered with blisters under the action of an internal fire ; her tongue was like a piece of red-hot iron, and her body produced in her cell the effect of a burning stove. Yet through all this she lost nothing of the serenity of her countenance, her mind was perfectly calm, and she seemed to rejoice in her sufferings. The sisters in vain endeavoured to find means to relieve her by applying oil externally, and giving her cold water to drink. All the remedies of the physicians were equally unavailing. There was

no doubt in the mind of anyone that the suffering came directly from the justice of God, who accepted from an innocent victim the expiation due from a person who was guilty of heinous offences.

At times the intensity of the invisible flames was so great that she lost the power of speech or motion for many minutes together, and the sisters could not touch her without burning their fingers. Sister Maria Anzela Segni, drawing back her hand quickly after touching her, said: "Mother, you are on fire!" "Yes, my child," replied the Saint, as if it were the simplest and most natural thing in the world; and then she would make light of her suffering, and say: "My sisters, I would be willing to endure anything that God chose to send, not to deliver souls from purgatory, but to save sinners from falling into hell; for the latter are in peril of their salvation, while the former are safe."

Thus did this holy spouse of Jesus Christ crucified accomplish her mission of saving souls, praying for the conversion of living sinners, and offering herself to suffer the punishment due to the sins of the departed. For more than ten years there was a constant stream of persons coming to seek her help, and yet such was her humility that she became more and more despicable in her own sight, and accused herself, as if it had been a crime, of being the occasion of so many persons coming to disturb the peace of the convent which she had chosen because it was far removed from the noise and tumult of the world.

Her penances and her boundless devotion to the holy souls obtained for her special favours

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at the hour of her death. Between one and two o'clock in the morning, her biographer tells us, the monastery re-echoed with heavenly harmonies. The nuns at first thought the novices were singing, but soon discovered that the music was not inside, but outside the house, and they knew that they were listening to the voices of angels who had come to lead their Mother to paradise. "Come, spouse of Christ," they sang—"come to receive the crown which the Lord hath prepared for thee from all eternity." Catherine prayed Our Lord to shorten the time of her agony, not for her own sake, but for the sake of her poor children, who were weary with watching. Her prayer was heard, and, feeling the end approaching, she closed her eyes with her right hand, as she was accustomed to do for her children at the last moment; then, crossing her arms on her breast, she gave up her pure soul to the angels, who carried it to heaven, and laid it in the arms of her Divine Spouse. She died at 2 a.m. on February 2, 1589, the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin.

III.

Blessed Mary of the Angels, a Carmelite nun of Turin, who died in the beginning of the eighteenth century, and was beatified on May 14, 1865, had a charitable devotion to the holy souls. Two motives inspired this devotion. The first was her love of God, for she knew that nothing is so dear to God as the souls which have been purified by the flames of purgatory, and therefore she ardently desired to deliver the souls whom He loved so much. The second motive was her love of her neighbour.

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She was supernaturally enlightened as to the terrible sufferings of those souls, and this knowledge so excited her compassion that she spared neither prayers, nor fastings, nor penances to obtain the desired object, and endeavoured to induce her sisters and secular persons to follow her example.

As there is nothing so beneficial to the souls in purgatory as the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, Mary took pains to have as many Masses said for them as she possibly could. While she held the office of Prioress, she occupied her time in making vestments and altar linen, which she sent to different priests, asking that she might be paid for her work by the celebration of Masses for the holy souls.

One night, during her term of office, while praying for the souls in purgatory, she felt impelled to promise that she would have five Masses said every month for their intention as long as she held office. Next morning, when she told her sisters what she had done, they assured her that the poverty of the house would prevent the fulfilment of her promise ; but God came to the help of the generous Prioress in a marvellous manner. During the course of the day an unknown visitor arrived at the convent, who told her that he wished to offer her an alms, in order that she might have five Masses celebrated every month for any intention she chose.

Mary of the Angels extended her charity to the holy souls so far as to offer herself to pay their debts for them. One year, on the Vigil of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, she told her sisters she wished them all to fast on bread and water for the repose of the faithful departed.

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The sisters willingly consented, but their confessor forbade them to do what she asked. It so happened that that very day she had a violent attack of fever, which lasted for twenty-four hours, and reduced her to a state of extreme weakness. Next day a great number of souls appeared to her to thank her for her charitable remembrance.

A nun in the convent who was at the point of death was strongly tempted to give up her faith. The devil tried to persuade her that she had lived a useless and ungrateful life. He exaggerated the severity of God's judgments to such an extent that the poor nun suffered the greatest distress. Towards midnight, Mary of the Angels went to visit the sick nun, and spoke to her in language appropriate to her condition. She reminded her of the wonders of Divine love, the infinite efficacy of the Blood of Jesus Christ, and the purifying grace contained in the Sacraments. Her words had the most consoling effect, and the sick woman recovered her confidence and composure. She was always afraid of purgatory, but the holy Prioress reassured her by telling her that the habit of the Blessed Virgin would protect her, and that she herself would willingly bear half the punishment God reserved for her in the other life. The nun died in perfect peace, and Mary of the Angels kept her word by offering the severest penances for the repose of her soul, which she saw shortly afterwards ascending to heaven.

God permitted the souls of the departed to visit her and ask for her prayers; and she narrates, among other remarkable facts, that Charles Emmanuel II., Duke of Savoy, came one night to implore her assistance. "I did

not see him," she said ; " but as I awoke I knew that it was he. In fact, he told me so ; he said : ' I am Charles Emmanuel, and I am still in purgatory : till this time Our Lord has applied to me only the prayers of your sisters. Pray for my soul, and let them pray also.' " All the nuns began to pray for him, and continued to do so till Mary of the Angels told them that he had entered into the joy of his Lord.

On September 7, 1714, when she was suffering from a severe illness which caused her excruciating pain, she was rapt in an ecstasy, and was heard talking with various persons who remained invisible. Father Louis of St. Teresa was immediately summoned, and asked the sick woman, who still remained in an ecstatic condition, " Whom are you talking to ? " " To a number of souls in purgatory." " Are there any that you know ? " " Yes, some that I know, and others that I don't know." " Come, now," said the Father, " come back to your senses, and to-morrow make your communion for the release of those poor souls." The holy woman did as she was directed, and next day, although she had some difficulty in receiving the Sacred Host, she had the consolation of seeing a great number of the souls of whom she had spoken the day before taking their flight to heaven.

IV.

The venerable Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, whose revelations on the Passion of Our Lord are so well known, had a special devotion to the souls in purgatory, who often came to ask for her help. She would kneel on winter nights in the snow, praying for them, till she

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was stiff with cold. At other times she would kneel on a piece of wood with sharp edges, or in a bed of nettles with which she would scourge herself in order to increase the efficacy of her prayers by her penances ; and she often had the consolation of receiving the thanks of the souls she had delivered. On this subject she related the following story :

“ When I was still a child, I was led by an unknown person to a place which seemed to me to be purgatory. I saw many souls suffering grievously, who earnestly asked for my prayers. I seemed to be gazing into a deep abyss of vast extent, terrible to look upon ; but it was a touching sight, for the place was full of silent persons, who seemed to be in great affliction, and yet there was something in their countenances which showed that in their hearts they had hope in the mercy of God.

“ When I prayed with fervour for the poor souls, I often heard voices round me crying, ‘ Thank you ! thank you ! ’ One day I had lost, on the road to the church, a little bag which my mother had given me, and thought I was to blame for not having taken greater care of it ; that evening in my distress I forgot my prayers for the poor souls. As I was going to fetch a piece of wood from the shed, a figure in white with black spots upon it appeared to me, and said, ‘ You are forgetting me.’ I was very much frightened, and immediately began to say the prayers I had forgotten. Next morning, after having prayed fervently for the holy souls, I found my bag lying in the snow.

“ When I was older I was going early one morning to Mass at Coesfeld, and I chose a lonely road in order to pray better for the souls

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in purgatory. It was still dark, but the poor souls that hovered above me in the air lighted my way. I was delighted to see them, for I knew them and loved them ; and in the night also they used to come and ask for my assistance."

The intercourse of Anne Catherine with the suffering souls was effected by the interposition of an angel, who led her through the vast spaces of purgatory, in order that she might refresh, as it were, by the fruits of her innocent penitence, those who were destitute of spiritual aid.

"I was with my guide," she says, "near the poor souls in purgatory ; I saw their great desolation, for they cannot help themselves, and the living seem to do so little for them. While I was thinking of their misery, I was accidentally separated from my guide. I hastened to find him, searching everywhere till I was nearly fainting with terror and fatigue. I saw him at last, and he said to me, 'Now you understand something of what these poor souls must feel in their longing for help.'

"My guardian angel often led me into solitary places, that I might pray for the poor souls ; and in tears, with arms outstretched, I implored God to have mercy on them. The angel also encouraged me to offer for the poor neglected souls any little sacrifices I was able to make, and I used to send him to the guardian angel of persons in sorrow, that they might offer their sufferings for the same object. Those poor souls are so grateful for all that is done for them ; and when I offer my sufferings on their behalf, they pray for me in return. It frightens me to see how men neglect and despise the graces that the Church offers them in such

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abundance, whilst the poor souls in purgatory languish with desire of them " (Extracts from the *Life of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich*).

V.

Mademoiselle de Martignat, who entered the Convent of the Visitation at Annecy a short time after its foundation, brought with her the extraordinary zeal for the consolation of the souls in purgatory that she had shown in the world, in spite of the attractions of the Courts of France and Turin, where she had lived. These poor souls, in fact, became the only objects of her care ; she multiplied her prayers and penances in their favour. Age and infirmities did not diminish her zeal, and, as she was dispensed from the exercises of the rule, she took advantage of her freedom in order to remain all day on her knees in the chapel ; and when she was asked how she could pray for so long, she answered that God had created her for that purpose, and that even if she lived as many years as she had lived days, she would not have time for all the prayers she wished to say.

Sister Marie Denise de Martignat seemed as if she had done with earth, and all her relations were with the world above ; she was constantly surrounded by the dear souls in purgatory. They told her their troubles, asked for her prayers, and thanked her for all the kindness she had shown them. She took the greatest delight in their visits, and said it was much more useful to converse with the dead than with the living, and there were a thousand things that they had taught her.

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This venerable Sister was employed as infirmarian for a long time, and was as active in keeping up the spiritual fervour of the sick nuns as in attending to their bodily wants. Often during the day she would sprinkle them with holy water, saying that the souls in purgatory had warned her there was no place in the convent where the devil was more active than in the infirmary, because it is from there that souls pass into eternity ; and if he cannot keep them out of heaven, he can at least tempt them to commit sins, and so make their purgatory longer.

Having passed her youth at Court, she always maintained a special interest in some of the Princes she had known. There was one of these, who is not mentioned by name in her biography, but who from various indications may be supposed to have been the Duc de Nemours, for whose salvation and conversion she prayed continually. He was killed in a duel by his brother-in-law, the Duc de Beaufort, on July 30, 1652, while Sister Marie Denise was at Annecy ; his death was instantaneous. On the Feast of Our Lady of the Snows she was praying, according to her custom, for the souls in purgatory ; she found herself suddenly transported to the brink of the abyss, at the bottom of which she saw the soul of the unhappy Prince, condemned for a long term of years. In the deepest distress, she ran to the Mother-Superior, Frances Magdalen de Chaugy, told her of her vision, and asked to have thirty Masses said for the souls in purgatory.

From that moment till her death the thought of that unfortunate Prince was her chief care ; she multiplied her prayers and penances, she suffered everything and offered up everything

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to God for the relief of that poor soul. Several times she saw him in the midst of the flames of purgatory, in such terrible torment that her fervour was redoubled. His guardian angel visited her and entreated her to pray and offer herself in sacrifice for him. God accepted her generous sacrifice, and the poor Sister endured indescribable agony. Her limbs were so swollen that she could hardly move, but she did not give up her regular attendance at the chapel. More than once it happened that she was unable to rise from her knees, even with the aid of a stick, and she had to wait till someone came to fetch her away. At four o'clock in the morning she rose and began to dress, in order that she might receive Communion at the community Mass. She admitted that her limbs were heavy, but she was not surprised, for she knew she was bearing the burden for the sake of her poor Prince; and one day, when Mother de Chaugy, seeing the agony that every movement caused her, asked her why she did not remain in bed, she answered: "I must wait till I am cold and stiff in the grave before I give up coming to visit my Jesus in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar. The soul of my poor Prince calls me to get up, and gives me no rest but when I am praying or suffering."

The sensible presence of this poor soul was her greatest consolation, and she never relaxed her endeavours to obtain prayers for his delivery. An altar in the chapel was to be dedicated to St. Joseph on the Feast of the Visitation, and she begged the Mother-Superior to have it dedicated to St. Joseph dying in the arms of Jesus and Mary. She declared that this devotion to St. Joseph dying would bring down

favours to persons in their agony and to souls in purgatory, because, she said, St. Joseph did not go straight to heaven, which Jesus had not yet opened, but went down into Limbo ; and it would be good to offer to God on behalf of the agonizing and the souls in purgatory the resignation of St. Joseph in leaving Jesus and Mary on earth, and the patience with which he awaited in Limbo the glorious day of Our Lord's Resurrection.

In addition to her physical sufferings, the good Sister began to experience great mental anguish, but the more she suffered, the more she prayed ; and one day she informed the Mother-Superior that the torment of the poor soul for which she prayed was to be shortened by some hours. Mother de Chaugy was astonished to hear her speak as if a diminution of a few hours were a matter of great rejoicing, but Sister Marie Denise answered : " We cannot measure time in the next world as we measure it here. Years of pain and sickness and poverty are not to be compared to one hour of the sufferings endured by the holy souls in purgatory."

She continued her charitable exercise until her death, and when she was dying she recommended herself to the prayers of Mother de Chaugy, and at the same time exhorted her to persevere in prayer for the souls in purgatory (*Lives of the First Nuns of the Visitation*, from the *Memoirs of Mother de Chaugy*).

VI.

One of the greatest virtues of St. Nicolas of Tolentino was his charity to the souls in purgatory. He frequently fasted and did penance

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in order to obtain some relief for them. His zeal and charity were most conspicuous when he was ordained priest. He frequently offered the Holy Sacrifice for them, and recommended them to God in the Memento for the Dead ; and God rewarded his devotion by allowing various souls to appear to him and thank him for his exertions on their behalf.

He was living at Villamanese, near Pisa, when one Saturday, after having finished his spiritual exercises, he retired to take a little rest, and saw in a dream the soul of Brother Pellegrino d'Osimo, who came to ask him to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for him and some other souls. St. Nicolas answered with his usual kindness : " May the Lord in His mercy help you ; but I cannot say the Requiem Mass you ask for to-morrow, as I have to sing the conventual Mass in choir ; and on Sunday we cannot say the Office of the Dead." " Alas !" answered the poor suffering soul, " if you knew what torments we endure !"

These words touched St. Nicolas, and he immediately went to the Superior and told him what had happened, and obtained permission without difficulty to offer Mass next day for the consolation of those who had come to ask for his charity. He passed eight days and eight nights in prayer, after which he had the consolation of seeing the soul of Pellegrino again, but this time radiant with joy, ascending to heaven with other souls also offering their gratitude to St. Nicolas, whom they called their deliverer (V. Surius, *Life of St. Nicolas of Tolentino*).

VII.

The souls in purgatory were the object of the constant prayers of St. Margaret of Cortona. Her devotion to them was quickened by the knowledge that in this work her charity was not rendered ineffectual by the perversity of creatures, as often happened to her in the practice of charity which she exercised towards the living. She knew that these predestined souls, in their perfect submission to the will of God, endure their torments with a marvellous patience, which does not prevent them from feeling their intensity, and that their certain hope of eternal happiness, their love for God and the desire to be free from the least stains before appearing before Him, are a source of consolation in their sufferings ; but she knew also that their submission to the will of God does not lessen their ardent desire to be released from their prison of fire.

For this reason she was constant in prayer and fasting and austerities of all kinds for the relief of these poor souls, who often appeared to her to implore her help, while those she had relieved came to thank her for her kindness. What was her joy to hear one day, among a multitude of these grateful souls, the voice of her own father !

One day, while she was praying for the dead, Our Lord said to her, " The souls in purgatory are so numerous that the mind of man can hardly imagine, and yet their friends do very little to help them ;" and another day, " The souls for whom you have prayed this morning are not damned, as some people think ; but

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they suffer such terrible torments that if their good angels did not visit them they would think they were, as they are so near to those who are really damned."

Two notorious thieves whom she had converted, before they went to execution, implored her not to forget them in the flames of purgatory. The Saint gave them her promise, and from that day prayed and fasted until they appeared to her, radiant with glory, to thank her.

Our Lord, whose adorable Heart is all love and kindness, desired to communicate to Margaret the joy He felt at the delivery of so many souls released by her prayers from their sufferings, and in an apparition He assured her with His own lips that assistance rendered to the souls in purgatory is of incomparable merit, and more pleasing to God than many other practices which attract more attention, but are less efficacious for good.

Margaret would have liked to kindle in every heart the same charity with which her own was on fire; she asked everyone with whom she was brought into relation to pray without ceasing for the holy souls in purgatory. "How weak is our zeal for the glory of God!" she often said. "How little charity and compassion we have for our suffering brethren! How easy it would be for us to do something to help these poor souls, and so lay up a store of merits in the eyes of the Lord! Our indifference is unjust; it is cruel, and exposes us to the risk of finding ourselves forgotten in our time of need.

When Margaret of Cortona died, a holy friar saw her soul carried to heaven by angels, sur-

rounded by a great multitude of those whom she had delivered from purgatory by her prayers (*Life of St. Margaret of Cortona*).

VIII.

Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, so well known for her devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, had a fervent and generous charity for the souls in purgatory. Mother Greyfie, in her *Memoirs*, speaks of her in the following terms :

“ Her charitable zeal led her to pray much for the souls in purgatory, whose sufferings were often revealed to her by Our Lord, as well as the best means of relieving them ; and when she offered for them all that she herself might do or suffer, the physical and mental pains she endured for some time increased in severity. She told me she had had a vision of two nuns, for whom she was praying, in the prison of Divine justice, and that one of them was suffering incomparably more than the other. The former accused herself of offences against that mutual charity and friendship which ought to reign in all religious communities, and said that those faults had brought upon her, among other punishments, that of having no share in the prayers which the community offered for her ; she accused herself also of slackness in the observance of her rule, and of too great care for her personal comfort, and said that without the Blessed Virgin she would have been lost.

“ The other soul, which suffered less, asked for no relief. Sister Margaret Mary was astonished at this, and it was revealed to her that God had wished that soul to win her crown by

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pure sufferings, and she had failed to correspond with this grace.

“One New Year’s Day, Margaret Mary was praying for three persons, two being nuns and the third a person living in the world, when Our Lord asked her which He should release. She replied humbly that she would leave the choice to Him, according as He thought best for His own glory. Our Lord then released the secular person, saying that it gave him less pain to see religious persons suffer, because they had greater opportunities for acquiring merit and expiating their sins during life by the faithful observance of their rule.

“The soul of a superior of our Order, lately deceased, had been recommended to the prayers of Margaret Mary, and a short time after Our Lord assured her that that soul was very dear to Him, and He was keeping a high place for her in heaven, as soon as she had finished her purification in purgatory, where she received great comfort from the application of the prayers and good works daily offered for her. On Holy Thursday, as Margaret Mary prayed for her before the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lord showed her, under the foot of the Chalice in which He was reposing, the soul of the Superior finishing her purgatory, and taking her share in His agony in the Garden of Olives; on Easter Day she saw her happy, longing for the sight of God; and on Good Shepherd Sunday she saw her in glory, exclaiming, ‘Love triumphs, love enjoys, love rejoices in God.’

“When she was praying one day for two persons who had held high positions in the world, one of them was shown to her as condemned to suffer many years in purgatory, and

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the prayers offered for the repose of his soul were applied by the justice of God to the souls of some of his subjects who had been ruined by his want of charity and equity towards them ; and as they had no one to pray for them after their death, God supplied the deficiency in this manner.

“ The other person was in purgatory for a number of days equal to the number of years he had lived on earth. Our Lord informed the good Sister that, among all the good works which this person had done, He had been specially pleased by the manner in which he had received certain humiliations in the world, not only without complaining, but without speaking of them.

“ One day, when she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, she saw the soul of a Benedictine prior whom she knew from having made her confession to him. He was surrounded by flames, which seemed to scorch her as she looked at him. He told her there were three principal reasons for his sufferings : first, his regard for his own reputation in preference to the glory of God ; secondly, his want of charity towards his brethren ; and, thirdly, his excessive attachment to creatures. He begged the Sister to offer all her prayers and sufferings for his benefit during three months, which, with the consent of her Superior, she promised to do. Three months later he appeared to her again, this time radiant with glory, as he was about to enter heaven, where he promised to intercede for her with God.

“ While Sister Margaret Mary was Superior of the convent, one of her novices lost her father, and asked the prayers of the community for

him. Margaret Mary joined in these prayers with great fervour, and the next time the novice came to her, she said : “ Be easy in your mind, my child. Your father has no longer need of our prayers ; he is able now to pray for you. Ask your mother what generous action your father did before his death, for that action has won him the favour of God.

“ The father had died at a great distance from the convent, and the novice did not see her mother again until the day of her profession, when she asked her what had been this act of Christian generosity. She was told that, when her father was about to receive the Holy Viaticum on his deathbed, a butcher of the town had been among those who accompanied the Blessed Sacrament, and had stood in a corner of the room. The sick man saw him, called him to his bedside, and, warmly pressing his hand, with a humility very uncommon in people of his position, begged his pardon for some harsh words he had used towards him some time previously, wishing that all present should be witnesses of his apology. God had revealed to Margaret Mary what had passed, and the novice in this manner had the happiness of being acquainted with her father’s happiness.”

Margaret Mary was favoured during her life with a great number of other apparitions, and it may be said that her communications with the souls in purgatory were increasing, like the prayers and sacrifices she offered for their deliverance.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

THE HEROIC ACT OF CHARITY IN FAVOUR OF THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

A KNOWLEDGE of the nature and advantages of the heroic act is enough to induce all persons who are interested in the holy souls in purgatory to begin the practice of this most fruitful and meritorious act of charity. This devotion consists in a voluntary offering made by anyone of the faithful in favour of the holy souls of all works of satisfaction done by him in this life, as well as of all suffrages which shall be offered for him after his death.

Father Oliden of the Theatine Order, Consultor of the Holy Office, is rightly considered as the first author of this devotion, which he encouraged by his sermons and writings, and for which he obtained many indulgences from the Apostolic See. But the heroic act had been known in the Church for some centuries, and had been practised by many persons distinguished for their piety.

Pope Benedict XIII., by his Brief of August 23, 1728, approved the devotion, and enriched it with many indulgences and special privileges. These favours, confirmed, were renewed on September 30, 1852, by Pius VI., who expressed his desire to see the devotion spread

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throughout the Catholic world. The privileges are as follows :

1. The personal indult of a privileged altar is granted for every day in the year to any priest who has made the offering of all his good works for the relief of the souls in purgatory. (It must be understood that this offering does not interfere with the particular intentions for which he may offer Mass, Communion, or any other good work.)

2. To all the faithful who have made this offering a plenary indulgence every time they communicate, applicable to the souls in purgatory, and a plenary indulgence for hearing Mass on Monday for the suffering souls. To gain either of these indulgences it is necessary to pray for a short time in some church for the intentions of the Holy Father.

3. The privilege of applying to the souls in purgatory all indulgences without exception, whether expressly stated to be applicable to them or not, and all indulgences that may be hereafter granted.

4. Those who cannot hear Mass on Monday can gain the indulgence by hearing it on Sunday. Those who have not made their First Communion may have that condition commuted by a confessor authorized by the Bishop.

Although no particular form of offering is required, the following may be used :

For Thy greater glory, O my God, adorable Trinity, in order to imitate more perfectly my blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, and to manifest my sincere devotion towards the Mother of Mercy, who is also the Mother of the Souls in Purgatory, I offer myself to co-operate in procuring the release of those captive souls who

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still owe to Thy Divine justice the punishment due to their sins ; and in the manner prescribed, without obligation under pain of sin, I devote myself with all my heart to the liberation from purgatory of those souls whom the Blessed Virgin so ardently desires to see delivered from the region of suffering ; and for this purpose I place in the hands of this most merciful Mother all my good works, so far as they are propitiatory in Thy sight ; and all those which others may apply to me during life or after my death. I beseech Thee, O my God, to accept and confirm this offering for Thy honour and the salvation of my soul. Amen.

THE END

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